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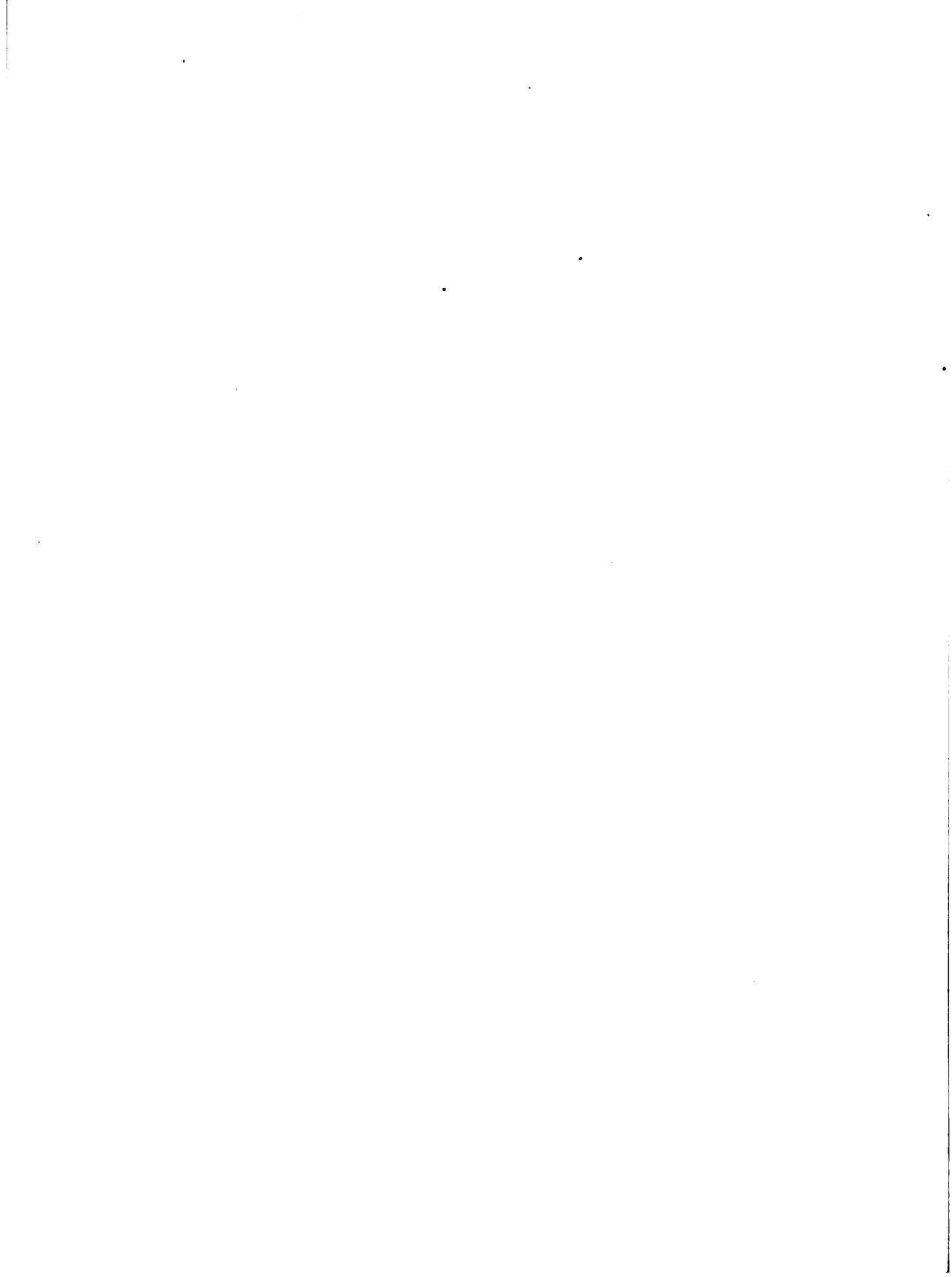
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THE RESTLESS AGE

BY
JOHN T. McCUTCHEON

Author of
IN AFRICA, ETC.

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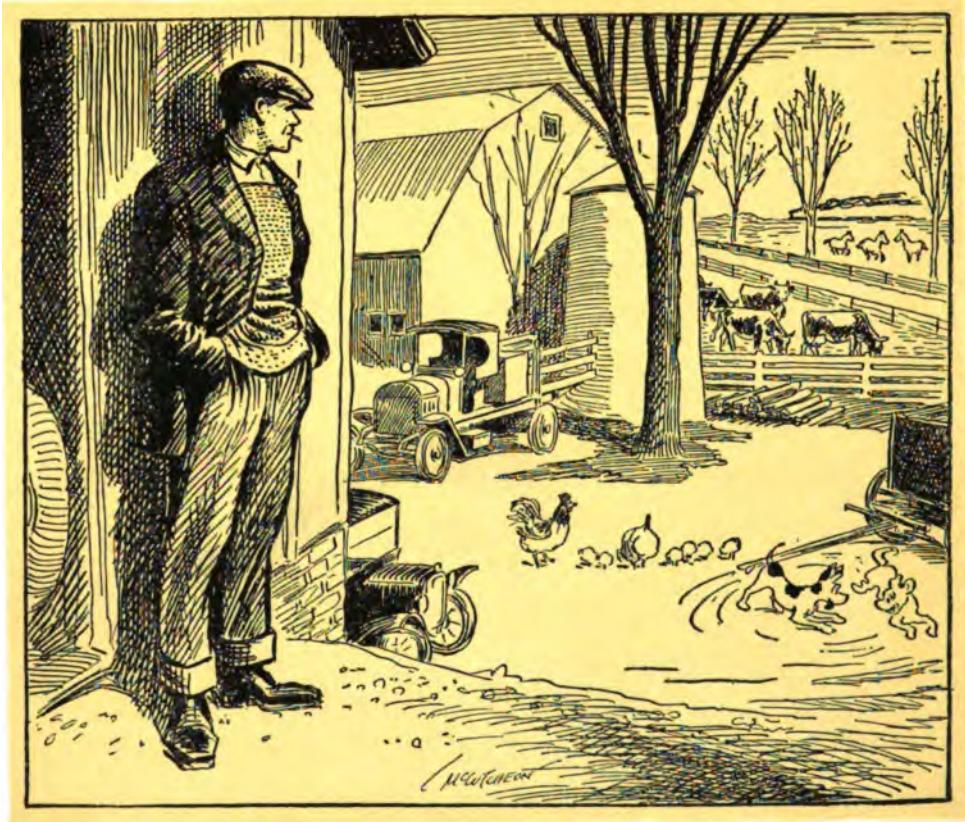
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**THE
RESTLESS AGE**



THE gray shabbiness of winter was giving way to the first flush of fresh spring loveliness. Trees and shrubs were dappled with tender green. The farm was awaking to the magic touch of spring.

On all sides nature was stirring with hints of the fruitful richness of the months to come. Already the barnyard was simmering to the sunny music of clucking hens

and peeping chicks, and before long there would be new calves and colts and puppies and pigs to add to the busy joyousness of life in the country.

A young man was standing near the door of the barn. In the lapel of his coat was a service button which told of service abroad. He was about twenty-three years old and, although he had been out of the army for over a year, he still showed the clear-eyed and clean-cut effects of his military training.

His eyes were following the course of a distant train which was whistling for the stop at the village station. In another five minutes it would have stopped, taken on its passengers and then moved onward toward the great city, a hundred and fifty miles to the north.

A look of restless discontent settled in the young man's eyes. His hand clenched and unclenched nervously.

"I've got to go," he muttered. "If I stick around here much longer I'll go crazy. I simply can't stand it." He brooded for a moment. "I guess the travel and excitement have spoiled me for this life. I used to like it here on the farm, but since I came back from the other side the place seems deadly monotonous."

His eyes turned toward the comfortable old farmhouse, surrounded by its cluster of big oak trees.

"There'll be an awful kick from the folks," he thought, "especially as it's so hard to get help these days. They won't want me to leave 'em in the lurch and go to the city. But, great Scott, there's no life out here! Their idea of an eight-hour day is eight hours in the forenoon and eight in the afternoon.

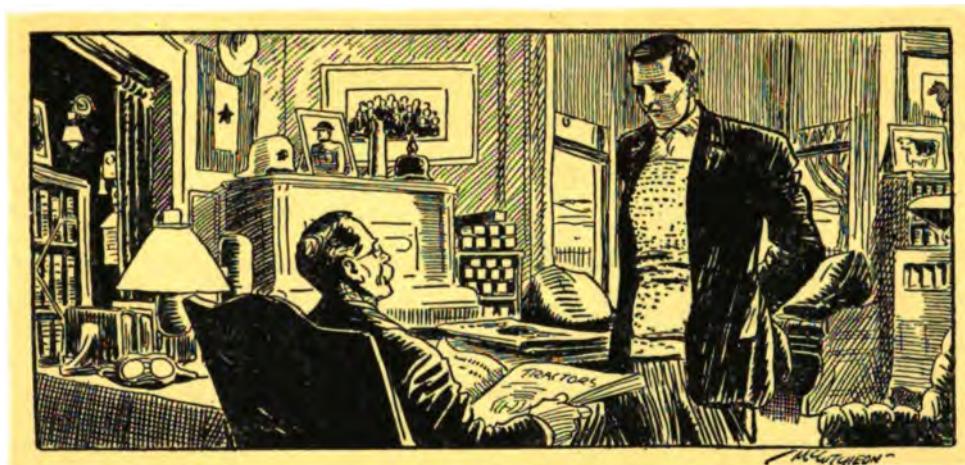
"Out of the ten boys who enlisted from the farms around here I'm the only one who has come back. The rest are all up in the city, having the time of their lives and making more easy money than I ever saw. They're seeing life, but as for me, the same old grind day after day."

The sound of the locomotive whistle came from the distant village. It seemed to decide him.

"I'm going!" he exclaimed, "folks or no folks!"

For an instant his lip trembled.

"I wonder how Emily will take it."



“So you want to leave the farm, eh ?”

The farmer looked up at his son.

“Yes, sir. I think I can do better up there. There are more opportunities in the city. Every day you read how much they’re making.”

The father smiled grimly.

“Yes, and you read how other people are getting it away from ‘em as fast as they make it. ‘Pears to me I hear more complaints about high prices than rejoicings about high wages. Don’t overlook the fact, son, that your dollar in the city don’t go very far these days. Out here you can hang on to it.”

The boy shifted uneasily, but his expression became set in its dogged resolution.

"Most of the boys have left the farms and are now in the cities," he said. "Of the bunch that went to France from this section I'm the only one who hasn't." His face lighted up.

"I had a letter to-day from Tom Austin. He says there's no trouble at all getting work. He says he could have his pick from a dozen different jobs."

"Has he settled down to one of 'em yet?" asked the father.

"No, not yet. He's looking around for just the right one—one he's interested in."

The father smiled again, this time with a touch of bitterness. "I reckon there are a lot of young fellows in that boat. Times have changed. Now'days a boy won't take a job unless it's congenial and then *don't* care whether he holds it, because he's always sure of getting another one. There's no incentive to work hard any more."

"But I intend to work hard, father. I'm not going up there just to have a good time."

"Well, I hope not, son." The father cleared his throat to hide the tremor in his voice. "When do you reckon on going?"

"Right away, father, just as soon as you can get some one to take my place."

There was a long pause.

"Well," said the older man, "if you've decided to go I s'pose there's nothing more to be said. You're over twenty-one. Of course we don't like to have you go. You know how we're fixed out here in the matter of help. All the young fellows seem crazy to get up to the city. There's lots more to see and do up there——"

"It isn't that, father," interrupted the son. "It's because there are more opportunities, especially now when such big wages are being paid and when there's such a demand for men."

"Following that line of argument, everybody on the farm will hike off to the city. And you know where that will lead us. You folks in the city will have no food. Out here we'll manage our three meals a day, while the city will be yelling itself hoarse for something to eat at any price." The thought gave him keen enjoyment. Then he became serious again.

"Have you told your mother yet?"

"Just now, in the kitchen. She's gone up-stairs."

"What did she say?"

"Oh, you know what she'd say."

"Well, son, it's your funeral. You're the doctor. If you're determined to go——" here his voice trembled and he wiped his glasses vigorously. "I had kind o' figured

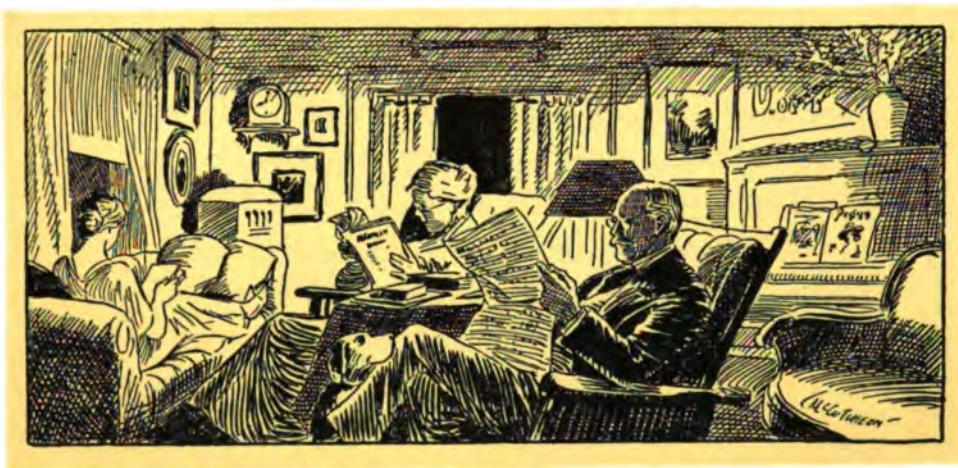
on your staying here and helping me. I think you're making a mistake. In the long run I think you'd do better here than in the city. But that's up to you."

He looked out across the wide acres of rich farm land. The distant song of the meadow-lark reached his ears. His face saddened.

"I guess there's nothing more for me to say. How about Emily? Have you broken it to her?"

It was the boy's turn to show emotion.

"I'm going over to tell her to-night," he said in a low voice.



MR. HARBRIDGE was an enlightened farmer. He believed that life holds something besides hard work and profits. Each year, instead of putting all his profits back into the business, he devoted part to making life pleasanter for his wife and daughter.

"The women on the farms have the hard time," he would say, "and it's a good investment to keep them contented."

He followed the same policy with his men. Besides paying them well he provided recreation, the lack of which so often drives labor from the country.

His farms were operated scientifically and the men who worked for him became in time skilled agriculturists.

Those who showed industry and intelligence were aided in their desire to become independent farmers.

"The one big human impulse," he often said, "is self-interest. It's the driving force that makes folks work. You've got to give a man something to look forward to—something besides his bare living—if you expect him to go forward. Self-interest is just another name for hope, though it don't sound so nice."

His philosophy was successful. By considering the ambitions and hopes of others as well as his own, he retained help when other farmers bewailed its scarcity.

"You see, my policy ain't entirely unselfish. I get better work and better results. If a man sticks and does his work I'll help him, and he knows it. If he don't that's his own lookout. There's always some natural drifters who don't stick to one job long enough to do it or them any good. They're hopeless, but the stayer deserves a square deal. He must have the same chance to improve his position that the city worker has."

Mr. Harbridge's two older daughters were the wives of tenant farmers who operated their father's farms on shares.

Emily was his only unmarried daughter—twenty and pretty, with eyes brimming over with friendliness.

On a certain evening in April she was sitting with her

parents in the living-room of the old farm-house. Through the window came the fresh clean smell of spring. Her eyes often sought the clock, but it was not of bedtime she was thinking. Her hair was arranged with special care and her dress was one of her prettiest.

Her father looked up from his newspaper.

“Well,” he said as he took off his glasses, “the city folks are having their troubles these days. Labor and capital seem to be getting most of the money, and the eighty per cent. in between are getting the worries. They’re the ones—the big, helpless, unorganized middle class—that I pity. And that’s where most of these boys who are leaving the farms will land. They all want white-collar jobs.”

He brightened up.

“But you’ll see ‘em tramping back to the farms before long. They’ll get sick of being robbed in the day-time and squeezed into a two-by-four room at night.”

He smiled at the thought.

“By the way, Emily, I was driving past George Wickham’s place to-day and I saw Tom.”

Emily looked up quickly.

“I didn’t get a chance to talk to him. He was tinkering with an auto out near the barn.”

He looked at his daughter.

"There's a level-headed boy, Emily. He's sticking to the farm. He won't be carried away by this city fever."

Emily flushed with pleasure.

"He's coming over to-night, father. He telephoned that he wanted to see me about something."

Her eyes were bright as she looked out at the moonlit fields.



EMILY HARBRIDGE answered a familiar knock at the front door. Tom Wickham had come.

"Well, speaking of angels—" she began. "We were talking about you just a minute ago."

"Well, thinking of angels," he answered, "I've been thinking of you all day."

She smiled. She was accustomed to his compliments, but she feared they came more easily since he had been in France.

"Couldn't you find anything else to think about?" she asked.

"Nothing half so nice. Honestly, Emily, you're getting prettier every day."

She led the way into the parlor, where the girl's parents greeted the young man with smiling amiability. He was evidently high in the family favor.

"Father has just been paying you a compliment, haven't you, father?"

"We were just talking about all the young fellows leaving the farms," said Mr. Harbridge, "and I allowed as how you were one who wouldn't get caught by the epidemic. I guess that's what Emily meant."

The boy's face was a study. Its expression changed instantly. The smile was gone and his troubled eyes showed the real distress he was feeling. He did not answer, and his silence became significant.

Emily sensed the strain, and a moment later the older people were vaguely conscious of something wrong. Mr. Harbridge wondered if he had said anything to embarrass the young man.

After an awkward pause Tom turned to Emily.

"Don't you want to ride over to town and see the movies?"

For a long time after the car started nothing was said. At last she spoke:

"What's the matter, Tom?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing much, Emily. I'm sorry if I'm acting like a gloom."

“Please, Tom, tell me.” She wanted to press his arm, but this was a new and a strange Tom. He had never acted this way before.

“Why, there’s nothing the matter, Emily. Maybe it’s spring fever or something.”

The girl was conscious of the vague unhappiness that crept over her. Something was wrong, something far from the happiness she felt this night had in store for her. She had looked forward to his coming so eagerly—since he had telephoned that he had something to tell her. Her lips quivered with disappointment.

“I’ll tell you, Emily.” He slowed the car until it barely moved. “I don’t know whether you can understand or not, but ever since I came back from the other side I’ve been so restless I sometimes don’t think I can stand it. When I was over there, in the mud and all that, I used to say, ‘All I want in the world is to get back to God’s country.’ I wanted to be home, here, with all the people and things I love. I was sick of travel and foreigners. In my imagination this old home seemed like heaven.”

His words came faster and faster as all the pent-up emotions of many stifled months burst loose.

“And then, when I came back, and all the people made a hero of me for a week or two, I was never so happy. I

had the happiness of having gone and of having done my job with some credit. But then, after a few weeks, I wanted to be going again, and that's the way it's been for months. All the rest have gone to the city and I—I"—his voice faltered—"Emily, I want to go, too."

Emily was crying softly. She was inexpressibly miserable.

"Poor Tom!" she murmured. "I'm so sorry."

They did not go to the movies, but returned home. She said a choking good night at the door, and her parents heard her come in and go at once to her room. She had not come in to say good night.



EMILY HARBRIDGE spent a sleepless night. She tried to think calmly, to see the situation from Tom's point of view, but through all her troubled thoughts ran a persistent one which would not down, one that hurt more than she dared admit—that he was leaving her and that he wanted to go. It kept pounding on her consciousness with painful repetition.

And why shouldn't he go to the city if he wanted to? She realized the lure of the city, the crowds, the big wages, the diversions that appeal to restless youth, and against all these attractions what had the peaceful country to offer?

A clean and wholesome life, a healthy out-of-door existence, the importance of being a producer instead of

a consumer, the chance for independence instead of being a subordinate—these were things which to her seemed important considerations, but to a young man impelled by curiosity, restlessness, and the spirit of adventure, what weight would they have in affecting his decision? She wondered why everybody didn't flock to the cities.

How was she to know that in millions of city hearts there is the ever-abiding dream of a farm and the raising of chickens, and fresh vegetables, and children strong and rugged from good air and wholesome food?

The thought of children thrilled her, and then followed a mournful procession of thoughts related to it. Tom had never asked her to marry him—at any rate, not in so many words. But it had been sort of understood. Even the neighborhood took it for granted.

And now he was thinking of going away without saying the words which she felt were in his mind but which she so longed to hear spoken out loud. Would he speak them before he left?

Perhaps to-morrow—and with the glow of hope from this cheering thought she finally dropped into an uneasy sleep. And it was this thought that sprang up in her first waking moments when the daylight was streaming through the open window. She looked at the clock. It was after seven!

At that moment Tom was boarding a train in the village three miles away. He was starting for the great city, and with each click of the rails he became more miserable, depressed by two haunting reflections.

He was leaving his father's farm at a time when he was urgently needed, when his leaving inflicted a hardship on the one who deserved all he could give. And Emily? What could she think of him sneaking away like this? She who also deserved far better treatment. But he would write her just as soon as he got to the city. And, besides, he had so much dreaded the good-bys to Emily. The more he thought of her—

“Hello, Tom; going up to the big town?” A friendly hand slapped his shoulder. It was Bud Andrews, who had been playmate, schoolmate and messmate. Well, he would have company, pleasanter company than his own depressing thoughts.

Bud sat down.

“We’re up against it over on our farm. Two of our men left yesterday and I’m going up to try to get a couple to take their places. Father’s half crazy. All work held back three or four weeks by the cold weather, and now these two birds quitting just as they can be of some use.”

Tom looked soberly out of the window, where every

field showed the effects of backward weather and backward labor and where the idle freight cars stood congested and useless on the sidings.

"Tom," said Bud gravely, "I wonder if people know what's ahead of them. The government will have to send a recruiting squad up to these city birds and conscript enough labor to grow a crop or else you'll see bread riots and machine guns in the streets next winter."



DURING the five-hour train ride Tom Wickham discussed with Bud Andrews the wisdom of his determination to leave the farm and try his luck in the city.

"You're making a mistake," Bud said. "You're too late. The easy-money period is about over and the city man has some rough sledding ahead of him. The gent out in the corn-field will be the lucky boy from now on."

"Tom," he continued, "you have a case of jazzitis and I'd just like to bet a can of goldfish you won't stick in one job longer than a month after you get it. If you do stick, and work hard, you'll find that life in the city can be just as much of a grind as life in the country. And if you don't stick you won't amount to anything. You can enlighten the world on that."

"Yes, I know all that," Tom answered. "But you'll have to admit the opportunities are greater in the city. And, besides," he added, with a touch of bitterness, "why should a man work on the farm to feed a bunch of birds in the city who are dragging down two or three times what he is getting? I fought for 'em for a dollar a day while they were making ten or twelve at home, and now why should I keep on working to feed 'em while they continue to make big wages?'"

Bud smiled.

"Tom, that listens all right, but don't forget the man on the farm with his hundred a month can save more than the guy up in town who is making twice as much. Under present conditions city life is like a madhouse. Everybody grabbing and nobody satisfied, no matter how much he makes. As for me, I'll stick down in the base of supplies where the eats come from, and in ten years from now I'll bet I have more money and a better digestion than you have."

In all the ride neither one had referred to Emily Harbridge, although she had been in the thoughts of both during much of the long journey. Bud wondered if there had been a split-up. He resolved to find out just as soon as he got home.

Before parting at the station it was agreed that they

would dine at Tom's hotel before Bud caught his evening train home.

As Tom walked toward the hotel he contrasted the present visit with a former one.

Then he was in uniform, swinging through the streets under waving flags to the music of a stirring war-time march. Thousands of people cheered as he and his comrades flowed like an olive-drab river between banks of humanity with the windows, high in the canyon-like walls of the buildings, bright with fluttering handkerchiefs.

Many an eye was dimmed and many a throat tightened as they went marching off to war.

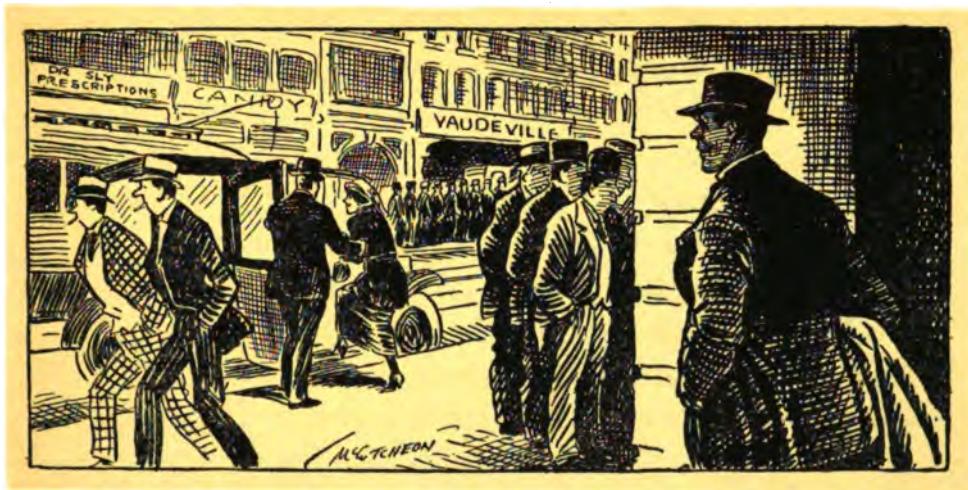
Then, he was cheered by everybody. Now, he walked unnoticed through these selfsame crowds, a stranger swallowed up in the vast loneliness of crowded city streets.

“Can a fellow ever feel at home here?” he wondered.

At the hotel he registered, and the impersonal look of appraisal which the clerk gave him revealed only a tall, decent-looking young man wearing a service button and with the healthy color of the outdoors in his face.

“You don't get that complexion in the city,” thought the clerk, as he blotted the name and address.

A moment later Tom was following the porter to the elevator and did not notice the young woman who approached the desk and studied the register.



SHE looked at the register and fixed the name and address in her memory.

“Thomas Wickham, Grangefield, Illinois.

“From a hick town,” she reflected, “and wearing a silver service button. Wounded, therefore, in France. Not in the Blackhawks, because they didn’t get into action. Maybe a Buck or in aviation. It ought to be easy.”

That afternoon, as Tom was leaving the hotel, he narrowly avoided colliding with a young woman. As he hastened to apologize their eyes met and an instant change swept over her face.

“Well, for goodness’ sake! To think of seeing you here!”

He smiled awkwardly as he tried to place her.

"You don't remember me, do you?" she exclaimed.

"I'm afraid I don't—quite," he said apologetically.

"I'm awfully sorry."

"Brest! Now do you remember?" As his face still showed mystification she hastened to add: "I'm sure it was Brest. Or was it St. Nazaire? I was in both places." And, without waiting his answer, she continued: "My goodness, do I look so different in civvies? Aren't you Mr. Wickham? I'm sure I can't be mistaken!"

"Yes, but—"

"Didn't you use to come to the Y in Brest," she hurried on, "just before you sailed? And don't you remember how crazy you were to get home—to some small town in Illinois—or was it Indiana? I can almost remember the name. Granger, or Grangeland, or something like that. I think you had been wounded or sick or something."

"Sure!" he exclaimed. "So you were one of the Y girls? Say, I'd never have known you in that get-up."

She smiled pleasantly. She was a most friendly looking soul, and to a young man undergoing his first spasm of loneliness in a great city she seemed sent by some providential dispensation.

"Ah, now you know me! I was beginning to feel em-

barrassed—and very much hurt, too.” Though her words were mildly accusing her eyes were full of welcome and forgiveness. Tom was wondering how in the world he could ever have forgotten her. He vainly searched his memory in an effort to recall her. So he said, rather lamely:

“Why, say, this is great! I’m awfully glad to meet you—again. I’ll never forget those days in Brest—muddy, and homesick, and crazy to get started home.”

“You always called me ‘Sister,’ ” she murmured, reminiscently.

“Well, I guess I called ‘em all ‘Sister.’ You girls were sure a godsend to us homesick Yanks. Did I ever know your real name?”

“Never,” she answered, laughing. “So far as the A. E. F. went, I was incog! I was ‘Sister’ to them all. But I did hope some of them would not forget me so soon.”

“Oh, please don’t!” he protested. “I’m sorry if I seemed to have forgotten you. Do you live here?”

“No,” she said, becoming serious; “I live in St. Paul. I’m just here to meet my father, but there was a wreck or something and his train is hours late, and so I must kill time.”

“Let me help you,” he hastened to say, prompted as

much by a craving for companionship as by politeness. "It's one of the best things I do."

"Well," she said, with her brows contracted in a quizzical little frown, "I suppose it is not quite proper, but I got used to worrying along without chaperons during the war—" here she smiled engagingly. "But you really don't deserve it. Will you promise not to forget me in the future?"

"I certainly won't forget you!" exclaimed Tom, with genuine sincerity.

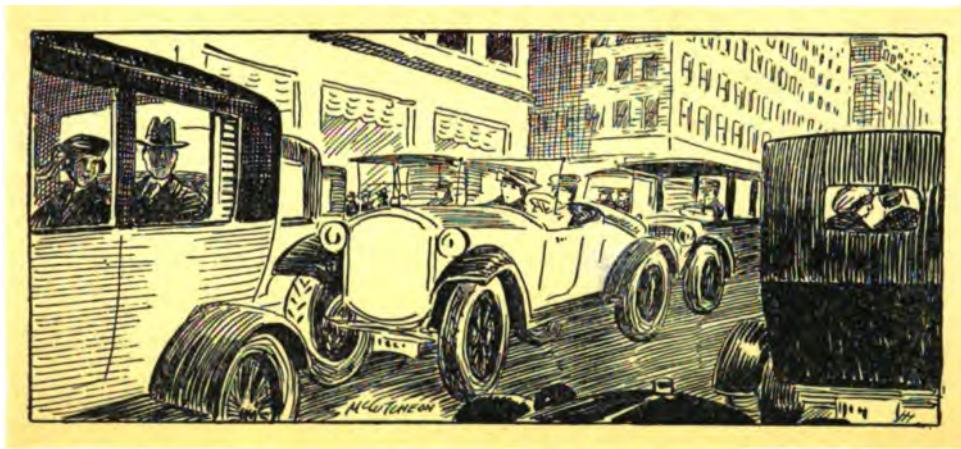
He never spoke a truer word, although he didn't fully realize it at the time.

As they left the hotel, each in high spirits and talking gaily, a young man coming out gazed after them in surprise. It was Bud Andrews.

"Gosh!" he murmured. "Tom's a quick worker! In society already. I wonder where he picked her up."

He watched them enter a yellow and drive away.

"Also, while I'm busy wondering, I wonder if our dinner engagement is off."



TOM and "Sister" settled back in the taxi as it threaded its way through the swirl of traffic.

Her eyes were sparkling.

"This is going to be such fun!" she exclaimed. "I love adventures! Here we are, you and I, strangers and alone in the great city, with hours ahead of us. We're in the lap of the gods, let come what may." She paused and allowed her eyes to linger for a moment on his. "I hope you won't find me lacking in the spirit of adventure."

Here was an opening which she expected him to seize, but his eyes turned from her to the bewildering panorama of city life that was being unreeled as they shot along. An endless stream of flashing motor-cars, sidewalks

thronged with sauntering people, all well-dressed, and shop windows crowded with beautiful articles temptingly displayed.

“Where does all the money come from?” he said, wonderingly. “Everybody’s kicking about high prices and everybody’s buying like mad. I’ll bet there are a lot of folks running cars who can’t afford it. I’ve seen at least a million cars since noon, and, believe me, I know what it costs to run a car these days.”

“What make of car have you?” asked “Sister,” quickly. Here was a chance to get a line on his financial rating. The make of cars was her Bradstreet, the barometer by which she appraised the probable bank-accounts of those she met.

“We have a couple of cars down on the farm,” he answered, “but we use the old flivver most of the time.”

She wondered what the other car was. Two cars! That sounded pleasantly solvent. From the corner of her eyes she studied his strong, sunburned face, and when its lines hardened a little her watchful eyes were quick to note the change.

“What are you thinking about?” she asked. “You’re not repenting of our adventure already, are you?”

“I’m sorry,” he said, “but just look! Men, men, men everywhere. Crowds of ‘em standing in line before a

theater, crowds of 'em watching a sign painter, more crowds watching a safe being lowered. And yet they say America has no leisure class!"

"Yes, but what of that?" she asked. "You always see crowds like that in the cities, don't you?"

"I s'pose so, but just now out in the country the farmers are praying for men to help with the crops that are to feed all these idle men. Next winter, when food is scarce and expensive, these birds will be yelling themselves hoarse at the high prices."

She nodded gravely, as if interested and impressed, but, within, she was irritated that his thoughts persisted in an economic vein rather than in one more complimentary to herself and more promising to her purposes.

They never acted this way, she thought, and she wondered why he was so different.

Her eyes ranged from her neat and very costly shoes to the very expensive silken stockings and the trim clinging skirt that sheathed the studied grace of her figure. It was a pleasing picture and she knew it. Was not the admiring up-and-down of many eyes a constant proof of it? And yet here he was, talking of crops and other stupid things.

His next remark rather startled her.

"But you're not interested in these things," he said,

with a quizzical smile. "Shall we talk of clothes, and theaters, and dancing, and scandal? Isn't that what girls are interested in?"

She flushed. To insult her by withholding her due of admiration and then further insult her by proposing a descent to the trivialities of her intellectual level—this was too much! Her lips tightened imperceptibly, and could he have read the thoughts behind those smiling eyes he would have headed the taxi back to the security of the crowded city.

Instead of which, at seven o'clock, they disembarked before a restaurant in a quiet place out where the streets had merged into country roads.



FROM somewhere far away came the sound of a voice.

Tom's eyes slowly opened, fluttered a wavering second, and as the heavy lids drooped together again there stole into his dazed senses the consciousness of pain somewhere in the world. He didn't know whose pain it was or where it was, but it was there, and it was becoming more and more localized within himself.

"Here, son, you'll have to be moving. This ain't a rest cure."

A large hand was gripping his shoulder and his body was being shaken vigorously to and fro. He looked up and saw a face vaguely familiar, a face in which anxiety was registered more than anger.

“You feel all right now, don’t you? You don’t feel sick, do you? You certainly had me scared, son.”

Slowly memory returned. Tom remembered the man. He was the waiter who had brought the dinner, but how remote that dinner now seemed when he and “Sister” had been shown into the little private dining-room where the dinner had been served. But where was “Sister”? There was no sign of her.

“The young lady?” Tom asked. “Where is she?”

The waiter smiled.

“She left a couple of hours ago—said she was going to telephone, and didn’t come back.”

Tom tried to rally his confused thoughts. His head was throbbing with a blighting ache, and a sickening weakness half paralyzed his body. He strove to recall what had happened.

“I’ll get you a taxi,” said the waiter, hurrying away.

What had become of “Sister”? Why had she left him? What time was it now? He looked at his watch, and the hour was two. Off in the other part of the house there were voices raised in a maudlin song, but the barbaric drumming and wail of the jazz band was no longer heard.

By slow degrees Tom reconstructed the events of the night so far as he could remember them. He and “Sis-

ter" had arrived and had entered the private dining-room. She had seemed so thrilled by the novelty of the "adventure," as she called it.

"What would my friends say if they could see me now!" she had exclaimed.

Then the dinner was served, and with it something to drink. He recalled a suffocating sense of confusion, a dizziness that suddenly enveloped his senses like an anesthetic, and then complete blankness. He wondered what he had done that "Sister" should have left him. Had he offended her? Try as he would, he could not remember. He hoped he had not behaved badly, because she seemed to be such a nice girl.

The waiter returned and helped him bathe his aching head with refreshing cold water, and then piloted him out to a car that was waiting at the door.

Tom muttered the name of his hotel, and as the car rattled off through the night the waiter gave a sigh of deep relief.

"Say, that boy had a close call. The shot was too strong for him. I thought he was all in, and I guess she did, too."

The long ride through the quiet darkness of the country roads and the scattered houses in the suburbs, and then the endless ride through the sleeping city gave Tom

time for the deep humiliation of the situation to sink into his consciousness.

He was overwhelmed with shame. His first night in the city! His first step in the campaign to win a place for himself! What a tragic beginning! What would Emily say if she could see him now, dazed, befuddled, aching with pain and remorse?

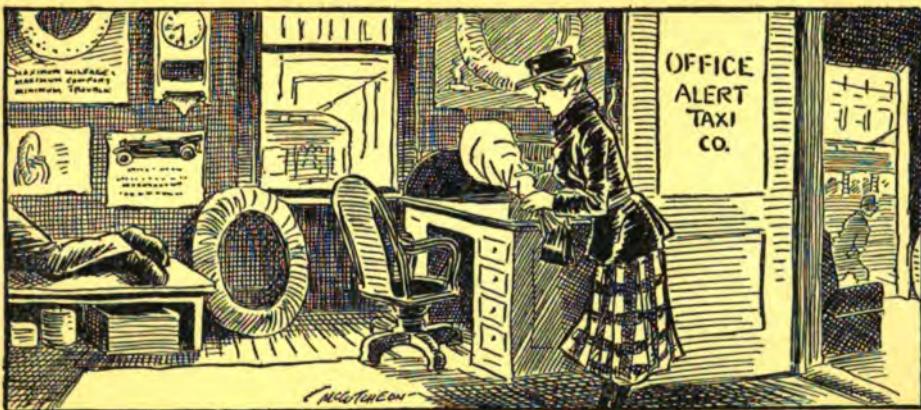
The car stopped, and he slowly lurched out on the sidewalk at his hotel.

“How much?” he asked.

“Six eighty,” answered the chauffeur.

Tom dug into his pocket for his purse, and a cold chill swept over him. The purse was gone! A feverish search of his other pockets yielded only a few small coins.

The chauffeur quickly stepped out on the sidewalk.



WHEN Sadie Johnson, the pretty telephone girl for the Alert Taxi Company, reported for duty at eight thirty a. m. she found a strange young man sound asleep on the office bench. As he was a nice-looking young man she allowed her romantic fancy free play in speculating upon the mystery. All through the forenoon he slept on, dead to the world, and if the telephone service during that time was not up—or down—to its usual efficiency it was because her thoughts were busy with the mystery which had come to brighten up an otherwise drab morning.

The floor boss and the day driver were unable to answer her inquiries, so it was not until noon, when one of the night men showed up, that Miss Johnson made headway in her researches.

"Who is our guest?" she asked. "Who is the handsome stranger who is parking on the office bench?" She did most of her reading on the screen.

The chauffeur grinned expansively and responded in the same vein:

"He is a poor but worthy young man who had not heard that the country has gone dry. He ran up a taxi bill of six dollars and eighty cents, and as the critical moment approached when he was to pay he discovered that his pocketbook had been stolen—cruelly stolen."

"Old stuff," was Miss Johnson's comment, "but he looks like a nice boy."

"Oh, I guess he's all right, only his story didn't sound convincing. He was out with a dame, a perfect lady, he said, but he didn't know her name and he didn't know where they had dinner and he took only one drink. Some drink that was! It must have had one hundred per cent. kick, because Buck says they had to lift him into the car."

"It's a shame the way these places are allowed to sell drinks," she remarked. "There are a lot of people yelling for law and order who break the law themselves three or four times a day! They are for law when the law pleases them and for order whenever they can get somebody to take the order. Well, what happened when he couldn't pay?"

“Well, he and Buck had an argument, and then a cop comes up and horns in. He suggests that the mysterious stranger go over to the station and report the loss of his fortune; but no, that would mean getting into the papers and the folks at home finding out—utter disgrace and all that, you know. Regular melodrama stuff. So finally he proposes to come here and work off the ‘mortgage.’ He wouldn’t telegraph home and he wouldn’t give his watch as security—present from mother, he says—and that’s why he’s here. The boss told him to get some sleep, and if he ever wakes up he is to work six dollars and eighty cents’ worth in the garage.”

The mystery, while shedding its baffling features, still contained elements of interest for Miss Johnson. To her romantic fancy the youth was held as a hostage.

She gently placed a blanket over the sleeping figure, for the morning was cool, and in leisure moments when the phone was silent she built quite a structure of romance about the young man. He was willing to work! That in itself was noteworthy. Most others would have soaked the watch or ducked at the first opportunity.

In the meantime all hands in the garage had the story. Their comments were humorous at first, then assumed a more serious aspect.

“Say, this guy don’t belong to the union,” said one

driver, "and this is a union shop. He'll have to join or else nothing doing for him."

The foreman was consulted, and his serious face reflected the fact that Tom Wickham had become an economic problem in the shop.

When Tom awakened the first thing he saw was the pleasant face of Miss Sadie Johnson, regarding him with unmistakable interest.



EMILY HARBRIDGE recognized the familiar hand-writing and with eager happiness ran up to her room, closed the door, and tremblingly tore open the envelope.

DEAR EMILY: What a long time it seems since we said good night and you told me to be sure to write and tell you everything that happened, no matter how little or unimportant. Well, here goes!

To begin with, I got on the train the morning after I left you, feeling at least one hundred per cent. blue. I haven't felt so miserable since I was in France and didn't get a letter for two whole months.

I felt mean about leaving the farm just when father needed me the most, but I had to get it out of my system, and the nice way father and mother took it was a million times harder than if they had made a scene. Well, any-way, I was indigo from the ground up.

Fortunately Bud Andrews was on the same train, and we gassed all the way.

When we struck the city we separated, planning to get together for dinner before Bud took the night train home. Well, I never showed up and thereby hangs a tale. It's too long to tell you now, but you must remind me to tell it to you sometime. When you see Bud, please ask him if he remembers a young lady in Brest or some place over there that we used to call "Sister." I didn't remember her myself, but he may. Kind of pretty and very friendly.

It was partly on her account that I got the job I am now holding down more or less against my will. It was like Aladdin, who used to rub a magic lamp and his wish came true. Well, I wished for a job, and when I woke up and rubbed my lamps there I was with a job wished on me.

I'm working in a garage, ministering to the ailments of sick automobiles. For a while the rest of the force threatened to make trouble because I didn't belong to the union, but for some mysterious reason they suddenly decided to let me stay until I could get another job or else join their union. If I was sure I wanted to stick to this work I'd join, but I'm not sure at the present writing.

At any rate, here I am, camping on the trail of Fortune—a long, long trail, believe me! I know the inside of a car from A to Z, so the work comes fairly easy. The fellows working with me are a pretty nice lot, but Sadie Johnson says they can get awfully fresh sometimes and have to be put where they belong. Sadie is the telephone operator at the garage, and all the men think the world of her. She's a breath of sunshine in this sordid city, and, in her cheerful way, she has a lot of influence over the men in the garage. I have a room at her mother's house, and I guess they've had a pretty hard row to hoe. The father was no good, and when he died he left nothing but debts. The only brother is away some place. They never

speak of him. How she has managed to keep her cheerfulness is a mystery, but she sure has; and that's going some for any one who has to telephone all the time.

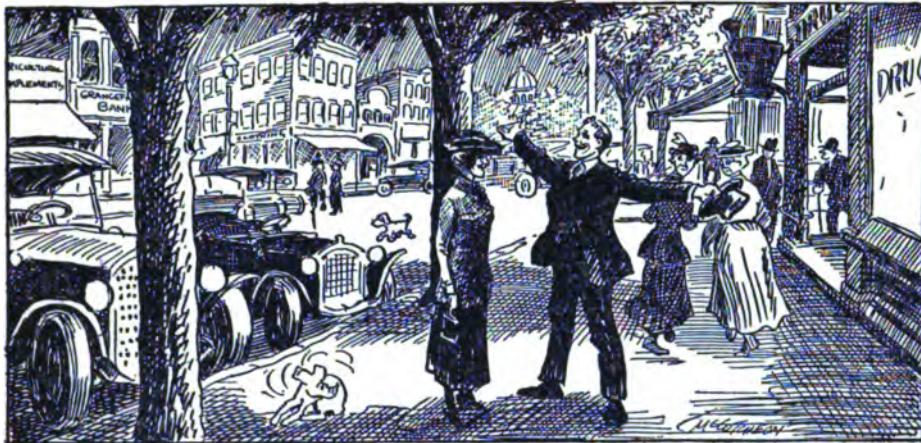
I eat in restaurants, and, do you know, I haven't connected with one honest-to-gosh meal since I've been here. The prices are something sickening. Asparagus, the kind we sell for ten cents a bunch—sixty cents or a dollar an order here. It makes me mad to think what a small portion of the profit reaches the pockets of the men who work their heads off raising food.

Do you remember when we read the Jungle Book years ago? Well, these city people remind me of the Bandarlog, always rushing around like chickens with their heads off, and, so far as I can see, never finishing anything they start. They work, live, and eat to jazz, and the city habit is like the drug habit. You know it isn't normal, but it gets into your blood. We saw a movie the other night that took it off to a T.

To-night is beautiful. I'm sitting in my room, looking out at the same moon that is shining down on the trees and beautiful fields around you, but here it shines down on a waste of chimneys and littered streets. I can't tell you how much I'd like to be down there, cranking up the old flivver to take you for a grand old trip to the Grange-field Movie Palace, but there is no magic carpet to carry me there. Please write very soon. I'll mail this as we go out to the movies to-night, so you'll get it to-morrow evening. Yours,

Tom.

Emily read the letter over again, then turned out the light and sat for a long time looking out upon the quiet fields. For some reason a vague unhappiness stole over her.



WHEN Emily Harbridge had read Tom's letter for the third time she turned off the light and for a long time sat looking out on the moonlight. She was unhappy. Not a word of real affection in the letter—only the old friendly phrases, now so pitifully unsatisfying.

Did it mean that he cared for her only as a dear friend? Or did it mean that some time when he got good and ready he would come and say the words she wanted so much to hear? This reflection stirred her to resentment.

In this mood she wrote her answer. The big clock down-stairs struck one before she finished, and when she read the letter over she burst into tears, and tore it into little bits,

Next morning she drove into Grangefield.

Here were the comfortable homes of retired farmers, whose land was being worked—and often worked to death—by tenants intent only upon draining the land of its utmost without thought of conserving its lasting richness.

In the main street were the usual numbers of farmers' autos, parked along the curbs. In other days the hitching racks around the public square were thronged only on Saturdays.

Emily thought of these things as she drove along, but always in the background of her mind hung the dull heaviness of a cloud which even the bright sunlight could not dispel. The name of Sadie Johnson kept intruding upon her consciousness. She was annoyed chiefly by the fact that she cared enough to feel hurt.

Her mood was ripe for reprisals. The patient Emily was becoming a rebellious Emily.

It was not by accident that she parked her car next to Bud Andrews' car or turned, with apparent surprise and marked cordiality, to greet that young man as he hurried out of a store toward her.

"Hello, Emily. I was just thinking of you. What brings you to town?"

"Oh, a lot of things." She was smiling gaily, and

Bud's active mind was already busy with searching deductions.

She had never been so cordial to him before. What was up? He wanted to ask if she had heard from Tom, but caution prompted him to approach the subject less directly.

"Is there anything in this great city that I can do for you?" He swept his arms in a wide gesture that included the Grangefield Moving Picture Palace, Berry's ice-cream parlor, the Carnegie library, and the length of the somnolent main street. "Theaters, restaurants, literature, anything you want. I await your pleasure."

He waited in an attitude of such deference that two elderly ladies passing regarded him with surprise, and proceeded with a new interest in their lives.

"Ah, ha! I have it!" he exclaimed. "I've saved up some money, and I propose we go and purchase a pair of the nicest ice-cream sodas that money can buy."

"This is so sudden," she smiled; "but I most certainly accept."

The phrasing of this remark, pleasantly suggestive of romantic possibilities, stimulated Bud to hopeful expectations.

As they sat at one of the little tables in Berry's the conversation ranged along airy topics as it slowly but

surely approached the matter uppermost in both their minds.

"By the way," said Bud casually, "any news from our wandering friend?"

"Who?" asked Emily. "Oh, you mean Tom Wickham? Yes, I had a letter not long ago. Some evening, if you happen to be over our way, remind me, and I'll read it to you." She resumed eating the ice-cream as though unaware of the significance of her remark.

"I'm happening to come over that way to-night," he said quickly, while through his thoughts shot the joyful reflection that Tom's letters contained nothing that could not be read to others.



EMILY HARBRIDGE was one of a type which is happily becoming more common in farming communities. Magazines, motor-cars, telephones, phonographs, movies, and mail-order houses had kept her abreast of the times. And churches, lectures, dances, and other entertainments were within easy motoring distance. Her chief difference from her city sister was the fortunate absence of that fungus growth of sophistication which modern city life inflicts upon girls of her age.

By nature she was kindly and sincere. Duplicity was foreign to her nature, and the consciousness that she was now embarking upon such a game made her feel uncomfortable and somewhat ashamed.

She cared very deeply for a man who was either unwilling or unready to propose to her. That he cared for

her she had no doubt, but whether he cared enough to want to marry her was another matter. She hoped he did, but the prospect of waiting and wondering seemed so essentially unfair that she was stirred by resentment and a spirit of retaliation. She resolved to play one man against the other, although she never would have expressed it so baldly.

Nearly all the ladies from Eve down to the present have had occasion to do the same, and it has become a time-honored weapon with her sex. Some employ it instinctively, others by design. It is said to be effective in promoting pep in lagging lovers. When husbands reach the comfortable stage of taking their wives' love for granted, the device is employed with effect. When young men dally along without declaring their intentions it often serves to awaken them to the need for positive action.

Such was the situation with Emily. Tom Wickham was in the city working off the restlessness born of the war. Probably some time he would come back to her, provided he did not in the meantime meet some one else he liked better.

Bud Andrews was on the spot, and as a substitute Bud was not a negligible quantity. He was keen and amusing. He was sticking to the farm at a difficult time, having

character enough to resist the lure of temporary high wages in the cities and insight enough to see that, in the long run, the man with land that produces the essentials of all life is bound to be best situated in times of depression or strife. Though profits might shrink, there would never be for him the need of soup kitchens and bread lines. He preferred being a creator instead of a parasite.

Bud was still single, but Emily's cordial invitation to call gave him a sudden hope that a kindly Fate was shaping a means of remedying that misfortune.

Arriving soon after supper, he found Emily smiling and prettier than ever. They sat on the porch, screened by morning-glories, and, for a time, talked of things in general. About them were all the signs of peaceful prosperity and wholesomeness, fragrant flowering shrubs, stately oak trees, a mild breath of spring lazily flapping the curtains behind them, and a rich yellow moon. It was a setting for romance and Emily's heart yearned for Tom.

Bud leaned toward her.

"You said something about showing me Tom's letter."

"Oh, yes; I'd forgotten. There's nothing much of interest in it, but I'll get it if you really care to see it."

Bud was satisfied. He only wanted the assurance that it was the kind of letter that could be shown.

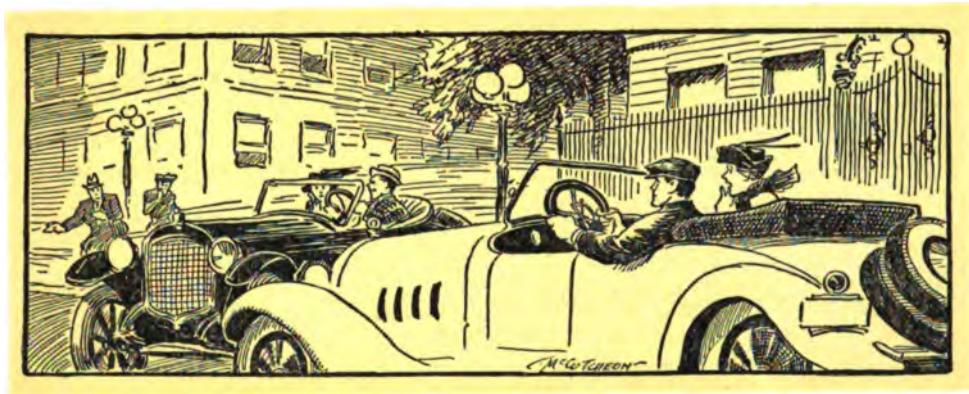
"Never mind. I'd rather just talk to you. I s'pose

he's having the time of his life up there—excitement and gaiety, and leaving us down here to enjoy the rural scenery.” He saw the little flush of resentment in Emily's face and, misinterpreting it, committed the tactical blunder of continuing:

“I don't suppose he said anything about the girl he met at the hotel when he first arrived?”

Emily was silent for a minute. To her it seemed an underhanded attack upon a friend. With an effort she controlled her anger and answered quietly:

“Oh, yes; he told me to ask you if you remembered a girl called ‘Sister’ over in France. He didn't.”



MISS SADIE JOHNSON, at her switchboard in the Alert Garage, was enjoying the luxury of a dull morning. Few calls were coming in and her mind was free to ramble off in interesting day-dreams. At the moment she was reflecting upon the scarcity of heroes in real life, whereas the movies were full of them. Douglas Fairbanks, appearing on the street, would attract a bigger crowd than General Pershing, and only the evening before she and Mr. Wickham had seen Tom Mix perform numberless heroics which made the young men of real life seem colorless in comparison.

The switchboard signaled a call. Crisp, cutting words came crackling into her ear:

“This is Miss Morland. Will you please ask if the repairs on my car will ever be done? It was to have been

at my door at ten sharp. It is now half past. Your service is becoming more wretched every day."

Miss Johnson answered with unruffled politeness. Her voice was electric sunshine. "Just a moment, please."

After connecting with the repair department she reported:

"Your car will be right over, Miss Morland. We're very sorry it has been delayed." Miss Morland rang off with a bang.

"Nice girl!" reflected Sadie. "Of all people she should be the happiest. She has everything in the world—oodles of money, big social position, and advertised as a great beauty. But oh, what a disposition! And how the boys here hate her! They won't deliver her car if they can help it."

A moment later the beautiful roadster with its distinctive coloring and monograms halted in the runway below her. The foreman spoke earnestly to the driver.

"Now, for the love of Pete, don't get into a row with her. Their business is worth too much. Tell her we've hurried as fast as possible."

"I'll try not to get into a fight with her," answered the driver pleasantly. Miss Johnson was visibly interested upon recognizing Tom Wickham's voice.

"So they've wished the job on him," she thought, and then called out through the window:

"Give my love to Lucille."

"Lucille who?" asked Tom.

"Lucille Morland—that's the dear girl's name."

The car shot out, leaving Sadie busy with a new line of reflections.

As Tom drew up before an imposing mansion on the boulevard the door opened and a smartly dressed girl hurried out. She was undeniably pretty.

"Has the car been repaired?" she asked sharply.

"Yes."

"Yes—what?" she snapped.

"Yes, it has."

For the first time she looked directly at him, an angry flush on her face. Then, biting her lip, she muttered something that sounded like "Insolent!"

"Are you sure it's running properly? I'm driving out-of-town and I don't want it to break down the way it did the last time you fixed it. One can not believe anything these garage persons say."

"Yes, I strongly suspect we are a bad lot," was Tom's comment.

Again she looked at him, this time sharply, as though something in his words had arrested her attention. His

face was serious, but she had a feeling he was laughing at her. She was conscious of a lack of that deference to which she was accustomed from this type of person, but as the man seemed respectful she repressed the cutting words that struggled for utterance.

Instead, she looked at her wrist watch and said: "I wish you would drive me around the block. I want to be sure it is all right."

As they started, a car driven by a young boy, who was obviously showing off before the girl at his side, shot around the corner at high speed, and only Tom's coolness avoided a serious accident.

Miss Morland started violently. White-faced, she glanced at Tom, but he was perfectly calm. She regarded him with new interest.

"You drive well. You would have made a good flyer," she said.

"I like flying much better," he answered, swinging the car in toward the sidewalk before her house.

"Oh, you've flown?" she exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Yes—what?"

"Yes, I've flown," he answered gravely.

He opened the door, but Miss Morland, acting upon a sudden impulse, said she would drop him at the garage.

When they arrived she suddenly asked: "What is your name?"

"Wickham—Tom Wickham."

"Well, Thomas, when I want a good chauffeur I'll send for you."

"Thanks, Lucille; I'll be delighted."

And Tom left her boiling with outraged dignity. It was not until an hour later that she thought of the crushing things she would like to have said. Her impulse was to burn up the wires to the manager of the garage, but later she decided there was a better revenge in her power.





THE more or less kindly Fates which shape the destinies of humankind are apt to be capricious. Upon their favorites they shower their gifts in prodigal profusion and then withhold the one thing above all others that the heart desires.

This was the case with Miss Lucille Morland. She had everything in the world except the one thing she most wanted. She wanted to fall in love, whole-heartedly and unreservedly, to be swept off her feet by the kind of overpowering passion one reads about in books.

Yet, at the age of twenty-eight, she reflected miserably, not one of her numerous and obsequious suitors had stirred her emotions in the least. It was maddening. She had tried to imagine she was in love once or twice, but in the broad daylight she knew in her heart it was counterfeit.

She wondered if the fault lay within herself, but decided that the modern breed of men had become hopelessly standardized into the commonplace.

As season after season passed and her hoped-for fate did not appear, she saw the future stretching out, a desert of boredom, and the acid entered her soul.

Then the war came as a welcome relief. She plunged headlong into war work and discovered, for the first time, that to be happy a person must have an occupation or a purpose in life. Idleness is an unfailing breeder of discontent.

The armistice came as a bitter blow. The prospect of returning to her former life of idleness and boredom filled her with dismay and then resentment—a resentment which for some reason was chiefly directed against the men. If the men could not make life interesting for her she would do her best to make life interesting for them, and she vowed it with clenched hands and set teeth.

One after another of her suitors was beguiled to the brink and then dropped with a crash. It was great fun, heartless, perhaps—but most diverting.

In the vernacular of youth she had become a “cold proposition,” and the men of her home set were steering clear of her. She had to go away, where she was not known, for fresh material.

She envied her maids as she heard them go laughing away with their sweethearts for an evening at a dance or the movies. It seemed like a wretched trick of Fate. Everybody was happy but herself, and yet she knew that the world considered her one of the particular favorites of fortune.

Money and position give no emotional thrills after one gets used to them.

Her father gave her everything money could buy, but because they came so easily, without effort or sacrifice, they lost much of their desirability. She found herself wondering what her father got out of life. He had no resources for diversion. He was locked in the toils of his business, which was huge and successful. He would have been amazed by the thought that he aroused pity.

In his estimation he was the typical American, masterful, with great driving force, accustomed to get what he went after, regardless of all obstacles. Opposition only intensified his determination to overcome it. That was his pleasure in life.

Money was not what he wanted except as he considered it the concrete measure of success. He had more than he wanted and more than he needed. It rolled in like the waves of a flood tide.

But the excitement of the game, the fascination of

playing for big stakes, the flattering consciousness of power in the community, kept him chained to the treadmill. To retire would mean the surrender of all the zest of life. Leisure would kill him within five years.

He was not actively interested in politics except as it affected his business. A few years ago he was crying "Let well enough alone" when Colonel Roosevelt and other radicals were threatening the peace of mind of the financial world. Now he was desirous of seeing some "safe and sane" man elected, some good man "like Elihu Root."

These are the two Morlands, father and daughter, who are to play a part in the unfolding adventures of Tom Wickham, late of a farm near Grangefield, now employed in the mechanical department of the Alert Garage.

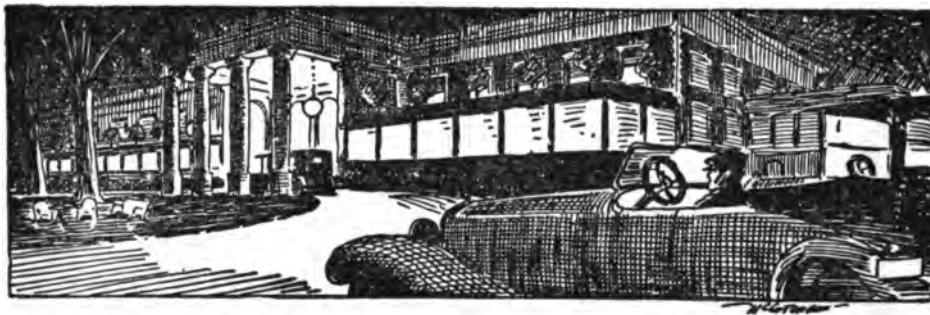
At three o'clock one afternoon, late in May, Miss Morland called up the garage and asked to have a chauffeur sent over at five o'clock.

"I wish you would send the young man who delivered my car two days ago."

Miss Sadie Johnson took the message.

"Very well, Miss Morland; I will tell him. It was Mr. Wickham."

A queer light was in Sadie's eye. She had an engagement to go to the movies that evening with Mr. Wickham.



LOOKING from her window at five o'clock, Miss Morland saw Tom Wickham arrive and take his place in her car.

She saw him look at his watch and then glance at the house.

So, instead of hurrying, she sat down to enjoy the pleasant contemplation of his impatience.

If she had been asked to analyze why she, Lucille Morland, was thus employing her time she would have sought justification in the claim that she was conducting a "sociological experiment." In reality she was bored and restless and there was diversion to be found with this amazing chauffeur whose language and manners betokened other things.

Her pleasant contemplation was short-lived. As she watched, he lit a cigarette and took from his pocket a

small volume, which he settled back comfortably to read. So she changed her mind and hurried down.

“Why are you not in chauffeur’s uniform?” she demanded.

“I am not one of the chauffeurs,” he answered. “I am in the repair department, but for some reason I was assigned to drive for you this afternoon.”

“Yes; I asked them to send you.”

Tom looked surprised.

“I hardly expected that—after the other day.”

“I intended to report you. Do you usually address strangers by their first names?”

“Only when some one sets the example. If you remember correctly, you called me by my first name.”

“That is different. I always call my servants and chauffeurs by their first or last names.”

“But I am neither your servant nor your chauffeur.” He smiled. “However, if it pleases you to call me by my first name, by all means do so. It is quite unimportant, although it seems to emphasize class distinctions.”

She was intensely irritated and grew more so when he asked:

“Shall you want me for a long drive?”

“In what way does that concern you?”

“Because I have an engagement at eight o’clock. If

you are planning to be gone longer it would be well to get one of the regular chauffeurs."

She thought, "An engagement with some girl," but said, aloud: "Never mind. We'll be back. Drive to the Elysian Fields Country Club."

"You'll have to direct me. I don't know these parts."

For some time they drove in silence through city boulevards, then passed into alternating suburbs and open country. At the crest of a hill, where the land ahead lay in beautiful green billows, she directed him to stop.

From a flat gold case she drew a monogrammed cigarette, lighted it daintily, and leaned comfortably back in her seat. As he was a cigarette smoker she suspected the anguish he must be undergoing, but he made no sign.

"You say you are a stranger here. Where are you from?"

"I have lived on a farm."

"Why did you leave? Isn't that a wholesome life?"

"I thought the city offered greater opportunities."

"Opportunities for what—work or diversion?"

"Work." Then he added: "I suppose diversion had something to do with it."

"The trouble nowadays," she commented sharply, "is that people think more of diversion than work."

"Is that your experience?" he asked. "What I mean

to say," he added quickly, "is that criticism of people who work comes too often from those who do no work themselves. I don't mean to be impertinent, but your comment invited it."

She bit her lip. As a subject for "sociological experiment" she was finding this young person decidedly headstrong. He was typical of the new radical thought which was upsetting the cherished tradition of her class.

"What is getting into the working people?" she exclaimed impatiently. "During the war they worked splendidly. Now there is nothing but strikes and non-production. They make promises only to break them. Doesn't a promise mean anything any more?"

"Well," he said slowly, "I wasn't here during the war. But I suppose there were no strikes because they agreed not to while the war was on. The strikes now are deferred strikes. Also the ten per cent. plus enabled employers to give any wages the employees asked. The government paid the bills."

She looked at him curiously, then abruptly changed the subject.

"You speak of city opportunities. Have you found them?" From the corner of her eye she watched him. Here he was in a beautiful car on a lovely country road.

“I’m sure you find this more agreeable than slaving on a farm.”

“I hate it,” he answered. “Anything would be better than this.”

She flushed angrily. Not another word was spoken until the car drew up before the imposing portals of the country club.

“I shan’t be long,” said Miss Morland.

It was six o’clock.

Seven o’clock came, and at eight he had the telephone clerk send word to Miss Sadie Johnson that he was detained and could not keep his engagement.

At eight forty-five Miss Morland came out, accompanied by a tall young man.

“You may take the car back,” she said curtly, “I am going in another car.”

“Very well,” he answered, and as he drove away her companion turned to Miss Morland with excitement in his voice.

“Who was that?”

“His name is Wickham, I think.”

“What!” shouted the tall young man.



As the tail-light disappeared behind the trees lining the broad white driveway, the tall young man found his voice.

"Chauffeur!" he exclaimed. "Well, be gosh, be gosh! Old Tom chauffing. Wouldn't that jar a fixed star! I ask you."

He was staring off in the direction the car had taken.

Lucille Morland regarded him with impatient curiosity.

"A friend of yours?" she asked. And as he continued to stare without answering, her eyes narrowed in a slight frown.

"Well," she said, "are we to stand here all night?"

"Oh, a thousand pardons! Awfully sorry. Like see-

ing a ghost, you know. Great mystery." They entered the car and whirled out of the Elysian Fields Club grounds scarcely two minutes after Tom.

As they struck the open road and the car leaped forward at a terrific speed, Miss Morland turned a quick questioning glance toward her companion.

Something in his face aroused sudden alarm.

"Harry," she exclaimed, clutching his arm. "Not so fast! Please don't drive so fast."

"My old car's always kind o' restless after she's been standing," he remarked amiably. "She'll slow down pretty soon. Got to humor her, y'know, Lucie. Got to humor 'er." He turned a smiling face toward her, and the car swerved dizzily.

"Oh, Harry, please slow down! I'm terrified! You shouldn't be driving in your condition. Please, Harry, please!" A red tail-light gleamed ahead of them. "Please be careful!" She shut her eyes as they shot past with a scant six inches leeway, so she did not notice that it was her own roadster. But for a few roaring moments its head-lights glared over them and Tom recognized Miss Morland's hat.

"Wow!" he exclaimed. "She's likely to end up in a ditch!"

Two minutes later his lights picked up something in

the roadway ahead. Swerving quickly, he brought the car to a stop and ran back to where a huddled, silent figure was lying. Off to one side were the remains of a crushed bicycle.

Tom shouted and blew his horn several times, till presently a light appeared in the windows of a house back among the trees. Confused voices were heard and two men came running out.

"A man's been hurt," shouted Tom. "He's still alive. Where's the nearest hospital?"

They stooped down, and one directed a harsh question at Tom.

"How'd you happen to hit him?"

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Tom, "I didn't hit him. It was the car ahead of me. I just came up."

There was no response to this, and the men silently lifted the body into Tom's car.

"We'll go with you," one said in a hard voice. "There's too much wild driving on this road. It's got to be stopped."

At the hospital in Rivington a hasty examination of the injured man showed a flicker of life still remaining, but the doctor shook his head gravely.

Shortly two officers arrived and questioned Tom. It was obvious that they did not believe his story. And

during the examination the two men from the scene of action interposed frequent hostile comments.

"You say you didn't hit him?" asked one of the officers.

"I found him in the road. He had evidently been hit by another car a very short time before."

"Aw, he's lying," exclaimed one of the men, who apparently had reason to be bitter toward speeders in general and particularly those who passed his house.

Tom turned quickly. "If I were the kind that would lie about it, I'd be the kind that would have run away. You'll have to admit that I called for help."

There was no answer to this.

"Any friends in town?" one of the officers asked.

"No, I'm a stranger," Tom answered. This seemed to decide their course of action.

"Well, son, I guess we'll have to hold you." But when further questioning revealed that he worked for the Alert Garage, and was driving for Miss Lucille Morland, daughter of Henry Morland, they conferred again.

Tom overheard the name "Morland" repeated frequently. One officer seemed to be for releasing him, the other for holding him. After a time they agreed.

The next morning Miss Lucille Morland received the shock of her life.



HAGGARD from a sleepless night, Lucille Morland rang for her maid.

"Has any one telephoned?" she asked anxiously.

"No, Miss Morland," answered the maid, surprised. It was barely eight! Who would be calling at this hour? Most mysterious, she thought.

"If Mr. Ellgate comes, I'll see him. No one else. And please bring the morning papers."

This unusual request further mystified the sharp-witted maid. She knew her mistress did not read the papers unless there was something of personal interest expected. And this early call from Mr. Ellgate—? What could it mean? And at this unearthly hour! Was their engagement being announced? And yet, Miss Morland's evident nervousness—?

As for Miss Morland, the cheerful sunlight, the usual sounds of the house and street, all had a reassuring effect, and almost made her wonder if the events of the evening before had not been part of a dreadful dream. It was only when she closed her eyes and shut out the sunshine that she saw again the stretch of skimming roadway and the flying figure of a man as their car struck his bicycle. How terrible! Harry Ellgate had slowed down, but she urged him on. In her mind had flashed the awful publicity of the thing. The papers would make so much of it if her name was involved.

She hoped the man was not killed. It would so complicate a settlement, whereas if he were only injured a lawyer could adjust the damages without her name appearing. She knew the man would ask a big sum if he knew Henry Morland's daughter had been in the car, and a jury of course would decide against a rich man in a case like this. Of course it could be appealed and appealed until the man would be glad to settle, but at best it would be awkward.

All these considerations shot through her mind in the few seconds of wavering uncertainty following the accident. Stopping meant such a lot of distressing formalities—and it was so easy to speed up and be swallowed by the darkness.

Again these thoughts crowded through her head as she lay in bed. She remembered with misgivings the attitude of Harry as they drove into town. "It's a rotten thing to do—to leave that poor chap lying back there." She knew it was only her insistence that had restrained him from turning back. Would his conscience force him to confess? Or would he be true to his code of ethics—not to involve a lady in disagreeable publicity? She decided he would remain silent.

The maid entered with the tray and the newspapers, and as she tarried Miss Morland dismissed her sharply.

"If I want you I'll ring." It was only when the door had closed behind her that Miss Morland seized the papers.

She did not have to search long.

There it was, emblazoned on the front page, and in her first swift glance her eyes caught the name, "Morland" and her senses reeled. How had they known? What did they know?

**BICYCLIST CRUSHED BY SPEEDING AUTO
DRIVER OF MISS LUCILLE MORLAND'S CAR HELD**

Jesse Martin, a farmer living near Rivington, was struck by a speeding automobile at nine o'clock last night on the Bellevue highroad. He is now in the Rivington

hospital, where the doctors say the chances of recovery are slight. He is still unconscious.

Police inquiry has developed some mystifying circumstances.

Thomas Wickham, driving the car of Miss Lucille Morland, daughter of Henry Morland, is being held by the police, although he claims his car did not strike the injured man.

"I was driving into town alone from the Elysian Fields Country Club at about nine and saw the man's body in the road ahead of me. I stopped and called for help from the nearest house. Two men came out and helped me get him to the nearest hospital. He must have been struck by some car that passed just ahead of me."

The two men testified that Wickham's car had passed the injured man and was some yards ahead. They make no secret of their belief that Wickham ran the man down.

Wickham, who has lately come to the city from Grangefield, this state, is employed at the Alert Garage, and is not Miss Morland's regular chauffeur. He was engaged for this special trip. He stoutly maintains his innocence, and in substantiation of his claim he cites the fact that he stopped instead of running away, and also the established fact that his car shows no sign of having struck anything. He had not been drinking.

Further police investigation is under way. A sharp search is being made for a car that shows such evidence of blood or bent fenders.

In the meantime Wickham is being held and subjected to drastic examination.

Miss Morland finished the account with terrified eyes. It was even worse than her fears. How awful! How

perfectly dreadful! Oh, why hadn't they stopped? Why had they run away? Nothing could extenuate that!

The telephone rang. She started hysterically. Was it the newspapers? Or the police?

As it continued to ring, insistent and determined, she trembly took off the receiver.



MISS MORLAND was intensely relieved to hear her father's voice on the phone.

"What's this I read in the papers this morning?" he asked testily.

For an instant she had an impulse to dissemble, but quickly realized the folly of pleading ignorance. It would have to come out sooner or later. And, besides, her father's influence might be urgently needed.

"Where are you? Can you come to my room?"

"I'll be right up."

Two minutes later he was seated by her bed.

"Well? What happened?"

"I drove out to the club," she began in a tense voice, "with a driver from the garage. I sent my car home and came back with Harry Ellgate."

“Yes?” There was a painful pause.

In a voice barely audible she went on:

“It was Harry’s car that struck the man. No one knows—except ourselves. The chauffeur must have been right behind us.”

She dreaded the next question.

“You didn’t stop?”

She burst into hysterical sobs.

“Oh, I wish we had! How I wish we had! But it all happened so quickly and, without thinking, we went on. It was a terrible thing to do. Oh, I’m so wretched!”

It had been many years since Henry Morland had seen his daughter in tears, and in a gentler voice he asked:

“Was Harry drinking?”

Another long pause.

“A little, I—I think.”

“He was drunk.”

She didn’t answer.

“Um—bad business. This chauffeur—he’s being held?”

“Yes. All I know is what is in the papers.”

“Has Harry telephoned you this morning?”

“No. I expected him to, but he hasn’t yet.”

“It’s a damned outrage that so much drinking is going on—outside, I mean. You can’t expect people to

observe other laws if the authorities don't enforce this one." He glowered thoughtfully. "However, that's beside the point. We must get this young man out and hush the whole matter up. Fortunately the injured man isn't dead, or wasn't last night."

"Do you think I will be drawn into it?" Lucille asked anxiously.

"I think not," answered her father confidently. Here was a difficult problem to meet and master. His whole climb to wealth had been beset with difficult problems, ranging from labor troubles to legal restraints. His experience with the law had robbed it of its terrors. And likewise his knowledge of public officials had revealed their points of vulnerability. He arose.

"Don't worry, Lucille. I think we can straighten out the matter. But if I were you I'd cut out this Ellgate. He's no good."

At his office Mr. Morland held a conference with his lawyer, of whose discretion he had ample proofs.

"That's the situation," he concluded. "See what you can do."

"I may have to use your name, Henry."

"Use your own judgment. I have complete confidence in it—and your discretion."

Late that afternoon Tom Wickham was released from

custody more or less to his own surprise. The police department issued a statement that his innocence had been proved beyond question, and that certain developments as yet undivulged would lead to a speedy apprehension of the guilty one.

In discussing the matter with Mr. Morland that evening the lawyer said with satisfaction:

“There’ll be a little flurry in the papers, but in a week the public will forget all about it. There’ll be nothing further to fear unless some meddlesome newspaper undertakes an independent investigation.”

“How about the injured man?”

“The doctors now say that he’ll recover.”

“Keep an eye on him. We’ll do something for him some time. And the chauffeur, Wickham?”

“He’s been released. The police say he’s a decent fellow. But his garage won’t take him back. Fussy about publicity.”

“Perhaps we may be able to do something for him later on—indirectly, of course.”

While thus the Fates, impersonated for the moment by Mr. Morland, were shaping the destinies of one Thomas Wickham, an elderly man with distress written on his face was inquiring at the Alert Garage for his son.



—McCloskey—

"HE WAS released this afternoon," said the manager uneasily. "But he's not employed here any more. You might find him at his room." The manager was feeling very uncomfortable. He had discharged Wickham because of the publicity resulting from the latter's arrest, and the garage force, believing him innocent, were resentful at the injustice.

Moved by a sudden sympathy, the manager called out: "Here, George; drive this gentleman over to Mrs. Johnson's. He's looking for Wickham."

Mrs. Johnson greeted him cordially.

"I'm glad to know Tom's father. Come right in." She glanced at the clock. "They'll be back soon."

Mr. Wickham sat down. "They?" he thought. Who were "they"?

"Your son felt so miserable about this affair," said Mrs. Johnson, "that after supper I insisted he take Sadie—that's my daughter—to the movies to get it off his mind."

Mr. Wickham looked around the small plain room. So this was where Tom lived. In contrast he saw his rambling farm-house and broad acres and wondered wherein lay the lure of city life.

Mrs. Johnson was friendly and sympathetic.

"When did you hear of it?" she asked.

"A friend of Tom's saw it in the morning paper and telephoned out to me, about twelve. I managed to catch the two o'clock train and just got here. I went to the garage first."

"Haven't you had any supper?"

"I couldn't eat anything," he said huskily.

"But Tom is innocent!" she exclaimed.

"I'm sure of that, but—you see—" He rubbed his glasses and, when he could trust his voice, continued: "He's our only child. When Bud told me on the phone that Tom was under arrest I felt as if—as if I wanted to die right there! I didn't dare tell his mother. It would kill her—the bare thought of the boy's being locked up."

"Yes, I know." Mrs. Johnson's thoughts turned swiftly to the subject that was rarely absent from her

mind—to the son who was away and whose name was never mentioned.

The return of Sadie and Tom was timely.

“Why, father! You here!” exclaimed Tom in amazement. “What’s the matter? You didn’t telegraph. Mother? Is she——”

“Bud telephoned about your—arrest, Tom. I came up on the first train.”

“But, my goodness, father, I didn’t hit the man. There’s no need to think about it any more. I hope mother isn’t worrying.”

“She doesn’t know, Tom. I didn’t have the heart to tell her. She thinks I came up about extra help.”

“Besides,” Tom went on, “I wasn’t really locked up. They just held me while they investigated. And then they let me go. There’s no disgrace in that—not a millionth part of the disgrace the people who struck the man must be feeling. I wouldn’t be in their shoes for anything.”

“Are the police trying to find them?”

“Trying? Certainly not!” He paused impressively. “The thing’s most likely been hushed up.”

“You mean they know?” exclaimed his father in amazement.

“They probably don’t know—exactly; but certain in-

fluences have been powerful enough to head off a real investigation."

"It's an outrage! And you are the one to suffer! I'll hire a detective myself!"

Tom smiled.

"No use," he said. "Just forget it. But I almost got really arrested this afternoon. When I came out of the station a sharp-faced little lawyer grabbed me and wanted to take the case for me. He said we could sue for false imprisonment, or sue the Morlands for damages, and split what we got. He was so persistent I had to threaten to break his face for him." Tom grinned. "That's the one bright spot in the day. The measly little rat!"

Mrs. Johnson whispered to Sadie, who left the room. As Mr. Wickham's gaze followed the girl, young and pretty, a thought of Emily Harbridge flashed through his mind. His eyes were sadder when he turned again to Tom.

"This Miss Morland?" he asked. "Why wasn't she with you when you came back?"

"She decided at the last minute to come in another car."

"Has she done anything to help you?"

"I haven't heard from her," answered Tom; "but why should I? She doesn't want to get mixed up in the

affair!" He spoke so bitterly that his father leaned forward quickly.

"Who did she come back with?"

"Some man. A tall fellow. It was too dark to see."

"Were they ahead, or behind you?"

"Now, father, what's the use of speculating? The thing's over and done with. There's no use, I tell you."

"But—"

Here Sadie Johnson returned with a pot of steaming coffee and some bread and butter. The tension was relieved.

Just then the doorbell rang.

"Mercy!" exclaimed Mrs. Johnson. "Who in the world is coming at this hour?"

She opened the door and confronted a tall young man who was weaving somewhat unsteadily on his feet.





HARRY ELLGATE's nerves were ragged after a sleepless night. Whenever he shut his eyes he saw the flying figure of a man and he would get up and take another drink.

In the morning he read that Tom Wickham was being held.

"Ghastly!" he thought. "I hit a man and leave him in the road. Wickham picks him up and gets arrested."

He pondered gloomily.

"If I confess, I get Lucille in for a mess of beastly notoriety. If I don't poor Tom stands the blame. Rotten business, any way you look at it."

After a restless day indoors, he was relieved to read of Tom's release, but was startled to see the police claimed to have a clew to the guilty one. He wondered if Tom had recognized him with Miss Morland at the club. If not,

all was well. If he had, something must be done, and at once.

He decided to find Tom and know the worst.

So, fortifying himself further with liquid courage, he arrived in time at the modest home of Sadie and Mrs. Johnson, where he found Tom and his father. Tom was amazed.

“Harry Ellgate!” he cried. “Well, for the love of Pete! Where did you blow in from?”

“Saw your name in the papers, did a little sleuthing, and here I am.”

“But I thought you were still on the other side.”

Harry beamed expansively. His relief was intense. Tom had not recognized him the night before.

“Well, it’s great to see you,” said Harry. “Last time was in the hospital with several punctures. I thought they had your number, old man.”

Sadie leaned forward, wide-eyed. “Why, Tom, you never told me you had been wounded.”

“Wounded!” said Harry. “He was a regular sieve. The whole division was talking—”

“Lay off!” interrupted Tom. “Tell us where you’ve been. That’s more interesting.”

“Oh, but tell us how he was wounded,” cried Sadie eagerly.

"It wasn't much," said Tom. "I'll tell you some other time."

"Oh, no, it wasn't much," repeated Harry. "Only a slight scratch through both lungs, and another through the arm and shoulder and neck. He was merely laid up for four months, that's all. But tell me, Tom, how long have you been in town?"

"Only a month or so. I got restless on the farm."

"I hope you've had enough of the city, Tom." His father spoke for the first time.

"Well, I'll admit things haven't been rosy."

"I hope you're ready to go back with me, Tom." There was deep wistfulness in his voice. "You know how much we need men—and—your mother misses you so much."

Sadie's face was a study as she gazed unseeingly into the empty grate. Tom was silent, and his father continued hopefully.

"You'll find things improved, Tom. They've organized a community center at Grangefield—all sorts of amusements—dancing, billiards, athletic contests. The boys won't have to come to the city for diversion any more." He paused. "Bud Andrews is at the head of the movement. They're talking of running him for mayor."

At last Tom spoke.

"I can't go back, father; it would be a confession of failure. I'd be ashamed. Later, perhaps, but not now."

Sadie's face brightened. Harry Ellgate's revealed sudden determination.

"You say you are short of men?" he asked.

"Very," answered Mr. Wickham. "They are hard to get and harder to keep."

Harry straightened up. "I want to get away from the city. I'll go down. I worked on a Kansas farm one summer with some fellows from college—sort of a lark, you know. Healthy life, too. Never felt better. Let me try for a couple of months."

Mr. Wickham smiled deprecatingly. The elegant figure, the slightly dissipated face, seemed to foredoom the experiment to failure.

"I've been too busy drinking up here. The city's reeking with booze," explained Harry. "But don't worry. I hear it's hard to get in the country."

Mr. Wickham shook his head. He couldn't imagine Ellgate working on a farm. "The hours are long, and we live very simply."

"I'm not fussy," replied Harry cheerfully. "A year in French farm-houses with animals and dung heaps has cured me of fastidiousness."

Mr. Wickham looked at Tom and Tom looked at Harry.

"I'm in earnest," said the latter, and they all smiled.

"Well, I'm willing," said Mr. Wickham, "especially if you think it will do you good. You're Tom's friend."

"Right-o! I'll be there to-morrow evening with bells on," and he arose and bade them good night.

"A drunken impulse," said Tom to his father. "He'll forget all about it before morning."

Nevertheless at nine the next morning Mr. Harry Ellgate, attired in his oldest clothes, was motoring toward Grangefield. At his side was a young lady, a most friendly looking soul.

"This is going to be such fun," she said. "I love adventures. Here we are, you and I, with real adventure ahead. I don't know where we're going, but we're on our way. We're in the lap of the gods, let come what may."

"You're a good sport, Sister," said Harry gaily as he stepped on the gas.



LATE in the afternoon Harry Ellgate's car rolled noiselessly into Grangefield. He was alone in it. The girl he called "Sister" abruptly changed her mind when she heard they were going to Grangefield.

"Not Grangefield!" she cried in alarm.

"Sure. Why not?"

Out of her memory leaped the name of the town and the things associated with it. Tom Wickham, her masquerade as a "Y" girl, the taxi ride, the dinner at the roadhouse, her desertion of the stupefied youth! And he was from Grangefield! No, most certainly she could not go there.

"I'm going back," she announced, and no amount of persuasion could shake her.

"But you were strong for this adventure," argued Harry.

"I've changed my mind," she said, and so he stopped at a village and put her on a train for the city.

"Funny folks, women," reflected Harry, as he resumed his way. "Like golf. About the time you think you know 'em, you find out you don't."

Of course he would miss her. She was to have been his refuge from boredom, for he knew this crazy impulse to work on a farm would carry with it a fair measure of dull hours.

"However," he thought, "*Ca ne fait rien*, as we used to say over there. Perhaps it's better. She might complicate things. She would be hard to explain in a small town."

He had not been in Grangefield ten minutes before he was intensely relieved that he did not have the girl with him. As he stopped to inquire the whereabouts of the Wickham farm, a young girl passing, who overheard his question, regarded him with sudden interest. He was struck by her loveliness.

"They don't grow complexions like that in the city," he thought. Fifteen minutes later he was knocking at the door of the Wickham farm-house.

Mr. Wickham's surprise may be imagined. His farm hand had arrived—an elegant young man in a seven thousand dollar roadster. The drunken impulse of the night

before had materialized into the accomplished fact. A condition, not a theory, confronted him.

"Well, well—why—" he groped for words. "But surely you're not in earnest, Mr. Ellgate."

"Don't call me mister," said Harry, beaming pleasantly, "I'm your new help. I'm in dead earnest. I'm not doing this to help you but to help myself. I think I need outdoor life and hard work—and besides, I want to get away from the city. You'll be helping me more than I'll be helping you. Just lead me to the work and," he added when Mr. Wickham said something about the spare room, "treat me like the rest of the hands."

Thus was Harry Ellgate, young man of fashion, installed into the Wickham household as a farm hand. It was a preposterous situation, but intensely interesting to all concerned. Mr. and Mrs. Wickham discussed it in low tones long after their usual bedtime.

"He's Tom's friend," said Mr. Wickham, "and if he wants to play at farm work for a while, all right. We'll humor him on Tom's account. He'll get tired of it in a few days."

"And besides," cried his wife eagerly, "it may lead to Tom's return."

But the strange part of it was that Ellgate stayed.

He was a type of young man often found in cities, a

contradictory mixture of charming qualities and glaring weaknesses of character. His likeable personality had made him the envy of college mates who were in every way more worthy. Attractive but undependable, interesting but weak, this was Ellgate.

Mr. Wickham showed him about the farm and explained the various duties he was expected to perform. He supplied the overalls which were humorously incongruous beneath Ellgate's pallid, aristocratic face. He illustrated the proper stance while milking a cow, and the correct method of cleaning out a stall. Momentarily he awaited the indignant revulsion against these menial tasks.

But young Mr. Ellgate was game.

There was no job too menial for him. He worked with an energy that must have impressed even himself. He exhibited no shame when he was sent to the village in his overalls, redolent of the stable. And in the evening he might be seen flashing through the same streets in his glistening roadster with its monogrammed panels.

Within a week he was the most discussed person in the community. He found himself surrounded with a pleasant veil of mystery which he took no pains to dispel.

At the first of his Saturday evening dances at the Grangefield Community Center he was the sensation.

“The Beau Brummel of the Barnyard” was Bud Andrews’ cynical comment.

It was at this dance that he was first introduced to Emily Harbridge.



HARRY ELLGATE and Emily Harbridge quickly became friends.

Harry at once discovered Emily's interest in Tom Wickham and his instinct showed him the swiftest road to her good graces. Tom was the bond of sympathy, so he talked of Tom and told her what a splendid fellow Tom was.

At the end of the first evening at the Community Center dance Emily felt as if they had been friends for years.

But if Harry had won a friend, he had also made a clever and resourceful enemy. Bud Andrews watched gloomily the rapid growth of Emily's interest in Ellgate. He was conscious that people were casting amused glances at him, and his thoughts grew bitter.

Gossip is alert and active in small communities, and next day it was buzzing about Emily and the "Beau Brummel of the Barnyard."

Ellgate was too shrewd to force his attentions on Emily. He did not see her again until the dance a week later. Once more they talked of Tom, and those who watched her eager interest and shining eyes attributed it to a different emotion. And another aspect of the little triangle set gossip guessing. Bud Andrews seemed very friendly toward his rival.

At the end of a month Harry's face had lost the marks of dissipation. Prohibition as practised in the country is not the farce that cities make it, and his eyes became clear and his muscles hard from healthy work and regular hours.

He was clever enough not to put on airs. He dressed quietly and was invariably good-natured. Such hostility as might have been engendered by his splendid car and his air of city breeding was swept away when he next appeared in overalls on a load of manure. People couldn't stay mad under these circumstances.

He took his part agreeably in the activities of the community—played on the local ball team, helped organize a dramatic club, sang in the glee club, and occasionally helped out with a fair line of dance music on the piano.

In a month he had established himself in a more wholesome natural life than he had ever known in the city.

Those who predicted the speedy failure of his "experiment" were surprised to find him staying on and on.

One evening Mr. Wickham and his wife were sitting on their porch. The day's work was done and their rocking chairs creaked in pleasant rhythm. The air was soft with the fragrance of summer and flowers.

"Where's Mr. Ellgate?" asked Mrs. Wickham in a low voice.

"He went up to his room right after supper. I guess he's going out."

There was a pause. Then Mrs. Wickham added significantly:

"He was over to the Harbridges' again last night."

Her husband said nothing, but his wife knew where his thoughts were.

"I wish Tom would come back." Mrs. Wickham's voice was full of the wistful note that always came when she mentioned her boy.

"His pride won't let him, mother. He feels he hasn't made good in the city. It would nigh kill him to come back now."

"Dear, dear, everything's topsy-turvy. Here's Harry, cut out for city life, and he's down here working

on a farm. And Tom, who's a natural out-of-doors boy, is set on staying cooped up in the city. For the life of me I can't——”

“Sh!”

Harry Ellgate came out on the porch. His overalls had been replaced by a trim comfortable suit whose quiet simplicity bespoke a fashionable and expensive tailor.

“Spoonng?” he smiled.

“Well, not exactly.”

“Great night for it,” said Harry. “I thought I’d urge my old bus out for a little ride. I’ll be back early.”

A few minutes later they saw his car glide noiselessly out of the barnyard and disappear at a leisurely pace down the road toward the Harbridges’.

For a long time the farmer and his wife rocked in silence. Nearly a half-hour passed before either spoke.

“Do you think Emily likes him?” Mrs. Wickham’s troubled words showed where her thoughts had been.

“He’s over there a good deal lately.”

“I do wish Tom would come home,” sighed Mrs. Wickham. “People are beginning to pity him.” Her voice broke. “I can hardly bear it.”

Long after they retired her thoughts continued marching back and forth in wearisome repetition. The big

clock in the dining-room struck hour after hour, echoing in the silent house.

At half-past twelve she touched her husband's arm.

"I haven't heard Harry come in," she said. "Do you suppose something has happened?"



HARRY ELLGATE's seven thousand dollar roadster drew silently up to the Harbridge gate.

"You must be a mind-reader," said Emily gaily, in answer to his invitation. "I was just wishing for a ride. It's too heavenly to stay in to-night." She called indoors:

"I'm going for a ride with Mr. Ellgate, mother. We'll not be gone long."

A moment later they were off. The fields were misty with the moonlight, which cast an enchantment over the land. Mile after mile of white roadway unrolled beneath them.

"I get awfully restless a night like this," Harry said at last, "—and adventuresome."

Emily was silent. If she heard him she gave no sign. Harry furtively watched her clear-cut profile. If she

had been a city girl, of his own set, he would have known how to proceed. If action is not speedy enough to suit a baby vamp of society, she drops a hairpin down her back and appeals for assistance in recovering it.

But Emily was different. Her use of such tactics was unthinkable. A false step on his part might wreck a friendship which, for him, was swiftly deepening.

And yet a night like this was not one for empty commonplaces. The witchery of the moon was in his blood.

For a long time they drove in silence. The smooth purr of the engine gave no suggestion of speed, but the unheeded dial wavered between thirty-five and forty.

At the farther edge of a little wood the car slowed and stopped as though of its own volition. Behind them the moonlight filtered through an archway of leaves. Ahead, away off across the silvery fields, the mists were rolling up like a lake.

“Isn’t it marvelous?” he said in a low voice.

“Yes,” she answered, “and just think of the thousands and millions of people in the stuffy cities who never know such beauty.”

They fell again into silence, each conscious of the electric tension of the situation, and oblivious of time.

Finally Harry spoke huskily.

“It’s so beautiful one is either intensely happy or

intensely miserable." There was a shade of meaning which Emily could not misunderstand.

But the spell was broken by the sound in the distance of an approaching car, and voices singing raucously. Quickly it came upon them, and a rough voice called out:

"Ah there, sweetheart. Nice night for spooning, ain't it?"

There was coarse laughter, and another voice, thick and unsteady, added:

"Say, Cutie, does yer ma know you're out?"

Emily felt the blood rise to her face in mortification and embarrassment. Harry stiffened in angry silence. Better endure their drunken banter than risk a mix-up.

But the other car stopped. There was the sound of wrangling, and then, to Emily's horror, it began to back toward them.

"We're in for trouble, I'm afraid," muttered Harry as he stepped on the starter, but it was too late. At the sound a couple of men from the other car leaped on to his running-board.

"Hold on there, brother. Don't be unsociable. Intr'-duce us to the lady. We wanna give you a drink." As he spoke he lurched against Emily's shoulder and she gave a startled cry. Harry pushed him backward violently and an angry curse burst from him.

"Oh, yer goin' to get nasty, eh? Come on, fellows, this guy wants to start somethin'."

Something in Harry surged up like an uncontrollable flood. He saw red, and, regardless of consequences, he leaped out and knocked the man down. As he tried to regain his seat the other man struck him on the head with a bottle and he sank to the ground.

The men in the other car cursed.

"Now you've played hell, Bill. Come on, beat it."

"Hold on! Maybe the dame can run the bus."

And Emily saw the four tires of the roadster hacked, one after another.

There was a scramble, and in a moment the men were on their way.

Emily was appalled. Harry unconscious, possibly seriously hurt; the car useless, on a lonely road, and no house in sight. Suppose the men should come back? Her heart gave a jump.

And her parents? What would they do as the hours passed and she didn't return? Thank heaven, they trusted her. But did they trust Harry Ellgate?



THAT experience was destined always to be a nightmare in Emily Harbridge's memory. Her first emotion upon seeing Harry unconscious and the car hopelessly disabled was one of abject helplessness. It would have been a pleasure to faint, but she knew she dare not succumb. So she braced herself and breathed a little prayer for help and guidance.

A quick examination showed that Harry had received an ugly gash in the head. Fragments of a bottle lay on the ground. She tried to revive him, but without success.

“What *shall* I do: oh, what *shall* I do!”

Should she wait in the hope that an automobile might pass? It was after ten and it might be hours before any

one would pass this unfrequented way. Or should she start afoot for the nearest house, leaving Harry unconscious and alone? Feverishly she renewed her efforts to revive him. Wiping off the blood, she bound the wound with strips torn from an undergarment, propped his head up on a seat cushion, and covered him with a robe.

Then she drew a quick breath and started ahead. There were haystacks off in the moonlight and she reasoned that a house could not be far. It was intensely lonely, and the shadows by the roadside seemed alive with moving terrors. Before she had walked a mile she was hobbling, for the little high-heeled house slippers were not meant for road walking.

Far ahead from a clump of trees rose the silhouette of a windmill, but long before she reached the shadowy group of buildings a chorus of barking dogs shattered the silence. Her courage almost failed.

Meantime Harry had come to, confused at first, but gradually clearer. Why was he alone? Where was Emily? Surely she wouldn't desert him. He called, but to no avail. Then a frightful thought struck him! Shocked into action, he sat bolt upright. Great heavens. Had those miserable brutes taken her in their car? He dropped his head into his hands and as he did so he felt the smooth folds of the bandage. Then he realized.

Thank goodness, she must be all right. She had fixed him up and gone for help. By jove, there was grit for you. A thrill that was new to him swept through him and lent him false strength. He struggled to his feet, only to collapse dizzily on the running-board. He tried again, but could not stand. His helplessness was maddening. His thoughts went out to Emily, somewhere in the night. Away off ahead there was the distant barking of excited dogs. He dared not let his imagination run.

He could not see Emily Harbridge standing resolutely in the middle of the road. The dogs would not let her proceed, so she had to call as loudly as she could.

Presently there was an answering cry.

“What’s the matter?”

“We’ve had an accident. Please come out, and call off your dogs.”

A light appeared in a window and soon a man came out. To him the white-clad figure of a girl in the road was weird and uncanny.

In a few words she told him the situation, and he got out his car and they started back down the road.

“Where you from?” asked the farmer.

“Grangefield.”

“Grangefield! That’s nearly fifty-five miles! I haven’t got gas enough.”

"Oh, but we must get there to-night. My family will be worried to death."

"We can put you up at our house," he said kindly, "and you can telephone. Your folks got a phone?"

"Yes, but oh, can't you understand? I simply must get home!"

"I don't see anything wrong about staying at my house. My wife can make you comfortable and she's good at doctorin' if your husband's hurt bad."

"Oh, but he isn't my husband. He—he's just a friend. Don't you see I must get home?"

The farmer's brow knitted. Evidently he didn't see. Why go traipsing off sixty miles at midnight when they could go comfortably next morning?

"You can telephone from my house," he said simply, "or else I'll run you in to the hotel at Moorland, six miles north."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Emily. "You're very kind," she added, "and I'm very grateful to you. We won't put you out."

So when Harry and Emily had been brought back to the farm-house, Emily, unwilling to insist on further troubling the amiable but stolid farmer, put in a call for her home, and after an interminable wait the operator reported the line out of order.



THERE seemed nothing to do but spend the night at the farm-house. If she could have telephoned her parents, or the Wickhams, or somebody, Emily could have faced the situation philosophically. But the whole Grangefield connection was out of order.

The thought of their anxiety and distress of mind was maddening.

“I’m sorry,” said the farmer; “but you can get home early to-morrow and explain everything. Besides, it’s just as well not to move your friend to-night. He’s got a bad cut on his head, and he needs a good night’s rest right away.”

So, accepting the inevitable, Emily Harbridge and Harry Ellgate remained at the farm-house. Emily’s one prayer was that her parents might sleep through the night in peaceful ignorance that she had not returned.

This prayer, however, was not to be realized. When midnight had not brought their daughter home they called up the Wickham house, only to find the same uneasiness. Fear of an accident alternated in all their minds with a vague distrust of the more or less mysterious young man of whom they knew so little.

"Oh, I just know something dreadful has happened," sobbed Mrs. Harbridge.

For the twentieth time she had gone to the window with ears strained for the sound of the returning car. But the night was silent and the bed in Emily's room was undisturbed.

Mr. Harbridge strove bravely to conceal his own deep concern.

"They've had a breakdown," he said with an attempt at cheerfulness. "Run out of gas, probably. Likely to happen to any car, and always at the worst possible time and place."

"But why doesn't she telephone? It isn't like Emily not to."

Her husband stirred uneasily on his pillow.

"Well," he said at last, "we can't do anything to-night. We don't know where to go or what to do. All we can do is to wait till morning. Try to go to sleep, dear. I'm sure everything's all right."

"Can't we call up Emily's friends to see if she's there?"

"No; if she was there, she would have telephoned."

At this, Mrs. Harbridge, half frantic with tragic imaginings, burst into tears afresh.

After an interminable night, the Harbridges were up at the break of dawn.

One after another, they called up Emily's friends, only to hear that she had not been seen. And from each came a comforting assurance that the car had probably broken down and that soon she would return.

It was one of these friends, Tillie Randall, whose fancy gave the incident a romantic turn. She called up Bud Andrews, whose interest in Emily was well known. She could not forego this opportunity to inflict pain.

"Have you heard about Emily Harbridge?" she asked excitedly. "She went away last night with that Mr. Ellgate, and hasn't returned. Her folks are half wild. They think there's been an accident. But my opinion is they've eloped. I wouldn't trust that man out of sight."

The telephone operator in Grangefield, listening in, added impetus to this by relaying it to friends, so that by nine o'clock in the morning the rumor was spreading wildly throughout the town.

It became a topic transcending all others. The farm-

ers forgot their dismay at the falling price of wheat. Emily Harbridge, of all girls! She was the very last one would expect to do such a thing. And, besides, wasn't she supposed to be practically engaged to Tom Wickham?

People love to be stirred by scandal, especially when it rests upon those who happily have escaped it heretofore; and no news spreads so swiftly or imparts such delight in the retelling.

Grangefield was in the grip of this interesting development when a strange car appeared. It was driven by a farmer, and in the back seat sat Emily Harbridge and Harry Ellgate, the latter with a bandage wound about his head.

The rumor of the elopement collapsed as the story of the night's events was related. From the farmer came unimpeachable corroboration. The bandaged Harry found himself invested with the glamour of a heroism which he modestly disclaimed.

"Miss Harbridge is the real hero," he said. "She fixed me up and went for help—miles away on a lonely country road. She tried to telephone home, but the line was out of order. The pain I felt with this bump on my head was nothing to what she suffered when she couldn't reach her parents by phone."

A little later he was propped up in his own room at the

Wickhams' and Emily was in the arms of an hysterically happy mother.

The one immediate action resulting from the adventure was taken by Mrs. Wickham.

She wrote to her son Tom urging him to come home at once.



Two letters were waiting for Tom Wickham. The first was from his mother, and he read it over twice with knitted brows. She wrote:

You must come home, Tom, even if only for a day or two. I feel you should know how things are going. Your friend Harry Ellgate is laid up with a bad cut on his head. Some drunken men struck him senseless while he was out motoring with Emily last night and cut all the tires of his car, so Emily had to walk a long way on a lonely road for help. And when she got it there was no way to get home. She and Harry stayed all night at a farm-house and were brought back this morning. You can imagine what gossip the affair has caused. People are openly hinting at an engagement, but I don't think it has gone that far. We don't want Emily to get too fond of your friend. Your father remembers the condition he was in when he first saw him, although it is only fair to say he has behaved himself while here. But

surely you can understand why you must come home, if you care for her at all. They are both to take part in an amateur play before long, and the rehearsals will throw them together a good deal. I feel sure Emily thinks the world of you, but you can't expect a girl to go on forever like that, especially when she never sees you. She used to come to see me often, but she hasn't been here now for nearly a month. You don't know how I pray to see you. You probably don't need money; but if you do, I'll send it; only please come next Saturday.

Tom folded the letter slowly, and for a long time stared out of the window.

He still had his room at Mrs. Johnson's, for he suspected his weekly rent was of vital importance. Also he was deeply grateful to Mrs. Johnson and her daughter, Sadie, for their unfailing kindness.

After his discharge from the Alert Garage he made several attempts to interest himself in uncongenial work, but he was too restless to endure them for long. At first it had been easy to get positions, but as the summer wore on they became scarcer. Staffs were cut instead of increased, and more and more men scanned the long neglected pages of want ads.

He became profoundly depressed. He wanted to go home, but his pride rebelled. He remembered Bud Andrews' terse remark:

“You're too late, Tom. The easy-money period is

about over, and the city man has some rough sledding ahead of him. The gent out in the corn-field will be the lucky guy from now on."

Tom had begun to think Bud was right until one day he received a strange note.

It was signed with an unknown name, but he noted the letter-head was that of a law firm.

"Your name has been suggested to us," it ran. "Are you open to take a position in the Henry Morland company? It will not pay much at first, but the firm is large, with wide interests, and there is ample chance to work up."

After his first surprise Tom guessed that probably Miss Morland had something to do with it—perhaps as a sort of sop for her responsibility in the loss of his garbage job. But this was only speculation.

He had taken the position as a matter of course, and had now held down a white-collar job for some four weeks. He was forced to reflect that it did not pay as well as an overall job, but he hoped that disadvantage might be only temporary. Neither was he disheartened by the other white-collar men who had held the same jobs at about the same pay for years of tenacious monotony. From these plodding ranks must come some of the

bosses of the future, as there were certainly not enough favored sons to fill all the big positions.

Tom had not been with the Morland company long before one of these same favored sons, Austin Newell, discovered him.

“For the love of Pete! I thought you were permanently crippled.” And as a result of this reunion with one of his old flying companions, Tom had been introduced around the office.

“Mr. Morland,” cried the exuberant Austin, “this is Tom Wickham, one of the best ever. He got a D. S. C. Persh pinned it on himself.”

As he remembered this incident Tom smiled and the bleak roofs and chimneys outside his window lost much of their drabness.



HE THEN opened the second letter.

It was an invitation to dine at the Morlands' the following Saturday—the same day, by the irony of fate, that his mother expected him to come home.

Tom read the invitation over and over, as if fascinated by the unreality of it.

“What can it mean?” he thought. “Is it pity, or just the caprice of a spoiled girl who is bored?”

He was conscious that the war had introduced new social standards and that the modern young women in search of diversion were ready to stray far beyond the old conventional limits. They invited all kinds of freaks to their houses, people who momentarily held the spotlight in this restless age—therefore, why not himself?

That must be it, he thought, though the conclusion was not flattering.

He would have been more pleased could he have heard the conversation between Mr. Morland and his daughter three nights before.

They had just finished dinner and had gone into the little morning-room. The great house was closed for the summer, darkened and draped in dust covers. Only a few essential rooms were kept open for their occasional use when they happened to be in town. Only an old caretaker and his wife remained.

Mr. Morland settled back in his favorite chair with his evening paper before him. He was reacting pleasantly to the coziness of the room, with its cheery fire in the grate—although it was summer—and further cause of his contentment was the comfortable thought that a successful deal that day had made him a great sum of money. His lawyer had devised an ingenious plan—and perfectly legal—whereby a considerable part of this could escape the income tax.

Therefore he was in a genial mood.

“By the way, Lucille, do you remember that young Wickham—the man who got the blame when you and Ellgate hit that fellow on the Bellevue highroad?”

The color left Miss Morland’s face. Heavens! was that dreadful case to be reopened?

But her father continued placidly:

"Well, he's working in my office now. He was on my conscience a bit, so I had my lawyer look him up and give him a place. I met him to-day."

"You met him!" exclaimed Lucille.

"Yes. It seems he's an old friend of Austin. They were together in the war, and I must say he seems like a nice boy. I was quite favorably impressed."

Miss Morland's cold blue eyes were staring into the dancing flames.

Strange how this young man kept coming up in her life! A few weeks ago she had never heard of him. Yet since then he was continually recurring. Harry Ellgate had known him, Austin Newell had known him, and now her father. And she was honest enough with herself to confess that many times in the past weeks she had found herself wondering what had become of him.

He was not on her conscience, for her conscience was not of a tender sort. But she was curious. This young person had piqued her interest. He was "different."

Through her mind shot a sudden thought. Why not continue her "sociological experiment?" Why not amuse herself for a brief moment? If he bored her, she could drop him without a twinge of feeling, as she had dropped many others. And, besides, society in the city was in the summer doldrums and diversion was rare.

"Would you like to have him to dinner some time, father?"

Mr. Morland, deep in his paper, murmured a pre-occupied approval, and so the invitation was sent.

She little realized what a formidable problem of conduct her caprice was costing Tom Wickham, now faced with the necessity of deciding between two courses.

"You don't know how I pray to see you," his mother had written. "Only *please* come next Saturday."

And Miss Morland had written in her aristocratic hand and upon her crested stationery:

"My father and I hope you will dine wth us next Saturday at seven-thirty. Quite informally, of course."

She had added the last words to spare him the anxiety about evening clothes, which she suspected he might not possess.

"The irony of Fate," reflected Tom. "Both are for Saturday night, and I've got to decide."

Something within him, an intuition which always told him the right thing to do, counseled him to decline Miss Morland's invitation by saying that he was going home for Saturday and Sunday. And yet he realized that powerful impulses were tugging against this course—curiosity, adventure, and, not the least, the appeal to his vanity in being an invited guest at the great Morland

mansion. He hated himself as he recognized the strength of this last appeal.

“Your mother will understand. You can go down a week later. It is important to your career to know the Morlands. Mr. Morland is your employer. He can help you far along your way. Your mother will understand if you explain it all to her.”

And against these insidious arguments arose the dear patient face of his mother, and in his ears was resounding the appeal, which he knew came deep from her heart:

“You don’t know how I pray to see you—only please come next Saturday.”

At a late hour, with his heart and his head struggling against each other, he sat down and wrote his two letters—one to Miss Morland and one to his mother.



IN THE conflict between heart and head, the latter won. Tom Wickham accepted the invitation to dine with Miss Morland on Saturday, and wrote a long apologetic letter to his mother. He knew how disappointed she would be, and with each word that he wrote he felt a growing weight of self-condemnation.

He strove to persuade himself that he was acting for what would be the best in the long run, but down in his heart of hearts he knew these arguments did not ring true.

Miss Morland received his note with a cryptic smile, and tossed it aside. "Very amusing," she thought: "'Miss Lucille Morland, the beautiful daughter of Henry Morland, is entertaining Mr. Thomas Wickham, ex-chauffeur, at a small dinner!' We go far these days to find relief from boredom!"

His mother opened his letter with trembling eagerness, and its contents fell like a blow. She had been so sure he would come. She had been counting the hours, and his room had been aired and made cheery with flowers. She had even called up Emily Harbridge to tell her that Tom was expected. And now this bitter disappointment.

"Tom is not coming," she said to her husband. "He says he is invited to a dinner at the home of the people he's working for, but that he'll try his best to come next week."

Later, when Harry Ellgate came in, his head still bandaged, she asked him about the Morlands.

"Well, they're quite important," he told her. "He's very rich, and his daughter is socially very prominent."

"Is she attractive?" asked Tom's mother.

"Well, she's very good-looking, but not appealing. I think I'd say she was rather hard. I've known her for years, and I must say I don't much like the idea of Tom's getting mixed up with her. She's generally very nice to a man until she's caught him, and then she gets bored and drops him flat."

"If she's that kind, I'm sure Tom won't like her. But, just the same, I wish he wouldn't see much of her."

Ellgate was struck by the note of tired wistfulness in

her voice, and as he walked out to the hammock in the orchard where he was spending most of his convalescence, his mind was busy with a noble plan for protecting Tom from the heartlessness of Lucille.

“Of all the cold-blooded propositions in the world, she is the champion! And Tom’s the next victim. It’s rather decent of her to stick around with her father when he has to be in town, but I can see her, bored stiff, with nobody to play with, and grabbing the first amusement that offers itself.”

He reflected for a long time before he reached a decision.

“I think I’ll just drop Tom a line which will finish this affair in one round!”

And so he wrote a rambling letter which concluded with these words:

“. . . So you are dining with Lucille Morland? Well, remember, Tom, she’s not half as cold and unapproachable as she seems. You can go far with her, and while you’re on your way please give her a little kiss for me.”

“There,” thought Harry as he sealed the letter, “that ought to do the business. Nobody has ever dared touch Lucille with a ten-foot pole! And, if Tom tries it, his social relations with the lady are likely to be absolutely over—finis! A drastic remedy, but justifiable.”

In his mind's eye he saw Tom make the advance—say, take her hand. Then the explosion. Exit Tom, pursued by the devastating words which Miss Morland knew so well how to use. Harry indulged himself in a broad and soul-satisfying smile.

Tom received the letter Saturday morning, and read the closing lines several times.

Late that afternoon a brief note from Miss Morland announced that she had a severe headache and would have to defer the dinner until Tuesday. So sorry, etc. He could not know that her "headache" did not prevent her motoring out to the Elysian Fields Country Club to a hastily improvised party in honor of a friend passing through town.

Tom spent a bitter evening in his room. He realized it served him right for having catered to his vanity. But this was the third time this girl had failed him, and in his soul was born a grim resolve that somehow, some time, he would get even.

In this spirit on Tuesday evening he entered the great Morland house and was shown through darkened halls to the cheery little morning-room. After some time Lucille appeared, smiling cordially. She was exquisitely dressed, and Tom was struck by her high bred beauty.

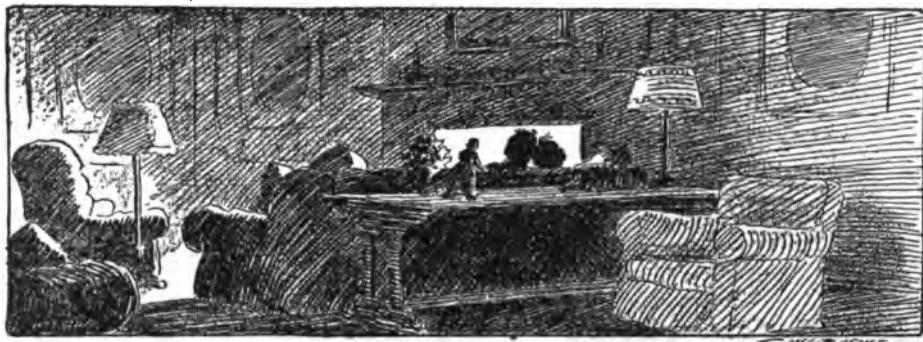
"Father had to attend a business dinner," she announced, "and so I'm afraid you are doomed to a dull

evening alone with me.” Her voice was apologetic, but her look belied her words.

The elderly caretaker, acting this evening as butler, entered then with cocktails and led the way to a charming little table set in the breakfast-room. Sherry, and afterward champagne, were served.

In common with so many American boys who served abroad, Tom had learned to drink.

And as the little dinner party of two relaxed in formality under the inspiriting influence of the wine, through Tom’s glowing thoughts came leaping the words of Harry Ellgate’s letter: “You may go far with her.... Give her a little kiss for me.”



IT WAS after midnight when Tom Wickham left the Morland mansion.

Lucille had opened the front door softly and let him out of the silent house. As he walked away he looked back at the imposing pile and tried to convince himself that he was awake and that the events of the evening had not been part of a dream. The warmth of her good-night kiss was still in his blood.

“Am I dreaming?” he reflected over and over on his way toward the car line that would take him back to his modest room on its unfashionable street.

His mind was whirling as he tried to piece together the memories of the hours that he and she had been alone together. The dinner with its plentiful garniture of wine, the little morning-room with its dimmed lights and

the dancing flames in the fireplace, the confidence, born of Harry Ellgate's letter, with which he had taken her hand, the startled surprise in her eyes, and then the complete surrender to his embraces!

"I'm dreaming!" he exclaimed. "It couldn't have happened!"

He remembered the sound of the automobile which stopped before the house, and the turning of the key in the door when her father came in—it must have been ten o'clock—and her whispered caution for silence until the great house was all quiet again.

It was nearly one o'clock when Tom let himself in at Mrs. Johnson's door, and Sadie Johnson, wakeful on her pillow, heard his steps gropingly pass her door. She wondered where he had been, and she wondered why he had rather awkwardly withheld from her the purpose that led him to dress with such care hours before. She was miserably unhappy. It threw her into a fresh fit of coughing.

If Sadie Johnson tossed uneasily on her bed, there was another who did the same, though in vastly different surroundings.

Lucille Morland went to her room quietly. She turned on the lights and sat for a long time gazing into the mirror of her dressing-table.

"You're crazy! You're perfectly crazy!" she muttered as she studied the gray eyes, now shining with a light which she had never before seen in them. Her cheeks were glowing, and as she looked at her hair, awry in its disorder, a smile with a suspicion of softness brightened her face.

"I don't care!" she exclaimed recklessly. "It has been heavenly, and whether he is chauffeur, tramp, hero, or prince in disguise, he has stirred me more than I've ever been stirred in my life. It is worth all the humiliation I shall feel to-morrow and for days to come."

She began to take down her hair, her hands flashing in and out of the long strands as they were woven into braids. Occasionally she would pause to look questioningly into the eyes in the mirror. Sometimes she smiled, and sometimes her lips tightened, but she proceeded deliberately, for to-morrow she could sleep late.

"I wonder what he is thinking of me," she mused, "I wonder if this brash young man realizes that he is the first man I have ever really kissed. Probably not," she reflected bitterly. "He must have thought me easy beyond words. But what I can't understand is how he dared, and why I let him, and, above all, why, instead of regret, I am now feeling so disgustingly happy."

Sleep came tardily to Miss Morland.

For a long time she lay awake, staring into the darkness. She reflected upon the more or less kindly Fates which had showered their gifts in prodigal profusion upon her, but had withheld the one thing she most wanted. She had wanted to fall in love, whole-heartedly and unreservedly, to be swept off her feet by the kind of overpowering passion one reads about in books.

She had tried to imagine herself in love with young men of her own set with whom marriage would be widely acclaimed as ideal. But in the broad daylight analysis she knew these emotions were counterfeit. They had failed to awaken within her that response which she would recognize as genuine if it ever really came.

And now, she reflected, the Fates had played another of their capricious tricks on her.

Was she to find that the only man who could stir her heart was one whose name and position she could not by the wildest fancy see coupled with hers in the announcement columns of the fashionable society journals?



IT WAS *late* when Lucille Morland awakened the following morning.

She lay for a long time thinking, reviewing, step by step, the events of the night before and lingering long upon those which made her pulse quicken and her cheeks flame with a strange elation.

Her heart was singing with the kind of happiness she had not felt since those girlhood days when her soul was just awakening to new and romantic emotions. She smiled.

“Well, it’s refreshing to find that I’m not immune,” she thought. “That’s something to be thankful for, anyway, however much of a mess I may be letting myself in for. Playing with fire may be dangerous, but it does warm one up most thoroughly.”

Finally she rang the bell, which soon brought the old caretaker’s wife with the breakfast tray.

"Any telephone messages this morning, Sophie?" she asked with an effort at indifference.

"No, Miss Lucille," answered Sophie, and Lucille was conscious of a sudden pang of disappointment.

She hadn't expected a message, but she had hoped for one just the same. Under the circumstances it would be only the polite thing to do. And yet, why should she expect one of his social limitations to think of doing the polite thing?

"There's a box of flowers for you, Miss Lucille." Sophie's next remark startled her. It seemed a direct answer to her thoughts.

So he had thought of her, after all! She was surprised to find how pleased she was, unless——

Her brow contracted in a slight frown. She began to look for motives which her experience with designing fortune-hunters led her to expect in every man who centered his attention upon her. Wealth had made her suspicious and distrustful.

"He's following it right up," she thought cynically. "He's probably like all the rest, and I suppose at this moment he is picturing himself marching down the aisle with me."

She shrugged her shoulders and her eyes hardened.

"I'd better end it now. I'll not see him any more. I'll

leave town at once and avoid getting in any deeper." Her eyes softened a bit. "But he *was* nice, and I'm afraid I shan't forget quickly. It's a pity he isn't some one—one *knows*. I'll drop him a nice little good-by note, and soften the blow."

She untied the box of roses and tore open the card.

As she read, the world seemed to collapse about her. All the sunshine faded out, and her eyes brimmed with tears.

She could hardly believe her senses.

He was ending it! He was lightly giving up what so many others had vainly sought.

She read again the swimming words:

"You were very nice last night, and I shall never forget. Won't you let these flowers say a little of what I haven't the words to express? I shall always remember the evening as a treasured episode, for I am sure you mean me to regard it as an episode that had its happy beginning and happy ending last night. And I'm sure you will be relieved to know that what I am trying clumsily to do is to say good-by and to spare you the pain of having to do it."

She left her breakfast untouched. Never had she suffered such a hurt before. Although she had in her

time mercilessly dropped many men, she had never been dropped herself. It was a new and painful experience, and it cut her to the quick.

Her one thought now was to get him back, and in her eagerness she forgot to follow the old established lines of feminine strategy, one of which is to let the man do the pursuing.

It was not characteristic of Miss Morland to overlook the rules of the game. Usually she played with a clear and calculating head, unhampered by emotions of the heart.

But now it was different. Her emotions had been sounded to their depths, and she lost her head.

She looked at the clock. He would be in the office at this hour. So she called the number of Henry Morland & Company and asked for Mr. Wickham.

There was a delay until Tom, still new in the office, was located. "Here, Wickham," said one of the officers, on whose desk was a telephone, "a call for you." He spoke grouchily, telephone calls from ladies during working hours being generally considered a nuisance.

Tom took the instrument. No one had ever called him there before.

"I must see you to-night," said Lucille.

"I'm afraid I shouldn't come again," he answered in

a low voice, and he observed the officer at the desk glance up sharply.

It was painfully awkward. He couldn't ring off without being offensively discourteous, and yet to every demur came a flood of insisting words.

He was conscious that a number of the men were now regarding him with amusement. It seemed as if he had been talking for hours. His face was burning, and he felt the cold disapproving eye of the officer boring into him.

At last, in despair, he said he would come.

"Come after dinner—at nine sharp. Don't ring. I'll open the door for you."



AFTER dining alone, Miss Morland told Herman, the old caretaker, that he need not wait up. Her gown, a graceful, filmy house dress, indicated to him that she would remain home.

She then spent many more careful moments before her mirror. She was looking her best, and nervous eagerness had brought a becoming color to her cheeks.

Just before nine o'clock she softly descended the stairs, moved noiselessly through the darkened halls, and awaited at the great front door.

Promptly at nine she opened the door for Tom Wickham, and, motioning him to be silent, she gently closed the door and led him down to the little morning-room where they had been the evening before.

She turned on a light and, listening at the door, she assured herself that old Herman and Sophie had retired

to their remote quarters. She then lighted the fire, and its cheery glow was soon suffusing the room.

Tom watched her with a grave face. Thus far not a word had been spoken. Then she turned suddenly to him and, placing her hands on his shoulders, looked intently up into his eyes.

“Well,” she said, “what are you thinking?”

He hesitated.

“Don’t you want to tell me?”

“I was thinking I shouldn’t have come to-night,” he said seriously.

“Not even if I wanted you to come?”

“No, not even then.”

“Aren’t you going to kiss me?”

“I resolved not to,” he answered, smiling, “unless—”

“Unless what?”

“Unless I can’t help it.”

She smiled confidently.

“You’re a funny boy. Come, sit down here, and tell me why you don’t like me. Am I so terrible?”

“You are fascinating,” he answered.

“Now you’re dodging the question. I don’t want to be called fascinating. I want to know why you don’t like me.”

“But I haven’t said I don’t like you.”

"No, not in so many words, but, remember, I had to plead to get you to come to-night. I've never done that before. Why didn't you want to come?"

He stared into the fire for a long time. Then in a low voice he spoke.

"There's no reason why you should be nice to me, Miss Morland. I can see only one possible reason and that is that you are bored and perhaps find me diverting as a momentary pastime. You don't care for me—you can't. And why should you? I'm not complaining, and I should be dishonest if I told you I cared for you—deeply, I mean."

"Then you don't?" she said in a curiously constrained voice.

"Is it likely that I should when I think you are merely amusing yourself?"

"But how do you know I am just amusing myself, as you call it? Aren't there plenty of others available?"

"That's what I can't understand."

She looked at him intently as she asked the next question.

"Do you care for some one else?"

"Yes, I always have—back as far as I can remember."

There was a long silence. Both were solemnly gazing into the flames.

“Is she nice?”

“Yes—she’s very nice.”

“Have you ever—kissed her?” she asked in a voice barely above a whisper.

“No, not since we were children.”

Quite suddenly Miss Morland burst into sobs and buried her face in the pillows. After a moment he sought to soothe her by smoothing her hair. He was miserably upset. The more he endeavored to console her the more bitter became her convulsive sobs. He kissed her hair and then found both her arms violently about his neck.

It was two when the little clock on the mantel, after sounding hour after hour, was at last successful in making itself heard.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed. “I didn’t dream it was so late. I must go.”

Her eyes were misty with happiness.

She turned out the light and led him to the front door.

“Please telephone me to-morrow morning—surely,” she said as she turned the knob.

As the great door swung open, a violent clanging of bells sounded through the house.

“Oh, mercy!” she gasped. “Herman set the burglar alarm! Hurry! Don’t wait! Run!” and, pushing him out, she fled up the stairs to her room.

From the darkened window she was horrified to see Tom with the hand of a night watchman on his arm.

An impulse to open the window and assure the officer that it was all right, that Tom was a caller and not a burglar, was stifled by the thought that she would be involved. It was so shockingly late.

Then she saw Tom whirl suddenly—a football player's trick—lurch against the watchman, and saw the latter fall heavily. Tom sprang away and the watchman, rising on his elbow, fired two shots at him, the effect of which she could not see.

"Oh, heavens!" she gasped. "How perfectly terrible!"



IT WAS a hideous nightmare for Miss Morland, except that she knew she was awake and not dreaming.

After the clanging of the burglar alarm and the two shots she listened in dread to the opening of windows in neighboring houses and the hurry of footsteps on the sidewalk and excited voices.

Summoning all her strength, she opened her door upon the now brilliantly lighted house and called out.

“Herman, Herman, what is the matter?”

“The burglar alarm, miss. I guess somebody’s been tryin’ to break in.”

From down the street came the clang of the police patrol, and a moment later a cordon of officers with drawn revolvers was encircling the house.

After a long time the old caretaker tapped on Lucille’s door.

"Don't worry, Miss Lucille. We've searched the whole house and found nobody. I guess the alarm scared 'em away."

But there was no sleep for Miss Morland. Uppermost in her mind was the dread of being involved, but in the background was a persistent fear for what had happened to Tom.

She assumed, and rightly, that he, leaving her darkened house so late, could not explain his presence at that hour without compromising her, and, rather than risk this, had toppled over the night watchman and fled. It pleased Lucille to think he had acted the gentleman for her sake, even at the risk of being killed.

But when morning came the fear of being involved restrained her from inquiring about him. Her one thought was to get away as quickly as possible—to put miles and miles between her and the chance of unpleasant publicity.

As the morning passed, and no message came from Tom, her fears became more intense. Suppose he had been mortally wounded, or captured; and, if the latter, would he be subjected to the third degree until he confessed why he was leaving the darkened Morland house at two o'clock in the morning? She shuddered at the thought, and hastened her preparations for departure.

At two-thirty heavily veiled, she started for her summer home ignorant of what had happened to Tom and moved by one impulse—to save herself from possible annoyance and embarrassment.

The early afternoon papers contained accounts of the shooting. Liquor thieves were suspected, but the most popular police theory was that it had been a frustrated Red plot to blow up Mr. Morland, because of his huge war profits obtained by speculating in foodstuffs. Some days before, a radical daily had charged him rather malignantly with having doubled his fortune during the war.

The night watchman, interviewed, described his assailant as a powerful young man, heavily armed, who had attempted to kill him. He himself had fired two shots, but didn't know whether either had taken effect.

What the newspapers did not print was how Tom Wickham, shot through the left shoulder, made his way to his room, and with the knowledge of surgical dressing gained in the war and the little first-aid kit he always kept, cleaned and bandaged the wound as best he could.

He dared not go to a doctor, for that would necessitate explanations, or else lead to his arrest and a possible third-degree inquisition.

Sadie Johnson heard him come in, and heard him

moving about for some time afterward. She fancied she caught the faint, penetrating odor of antiseptics.

When Mrs. Johnson tapped on his door at the usual hour Tom called out that he was not feeling well, and requested her to ask Sadie to telephone the office from the drug store that he would not be down.

“Can I do anything for you?”

“No, thank you. I’ll be all right after a while.”

Sadie went to her work at the Alert Garage, her quick mind entirely preoccupied with speculation. It was very mysterious. But it was not until she saw the account of the shooting at the Morland house that her conclusions began to take form. She folded up the papers and took them home.

Her mother was bringing Tom his supper. He was sitting up in bed, and did not look ill.

“Here’s something that may interest you,” she said, handing him the papers. He started and looked at her queerly. She smiled.

“Interesting story, isn’t it?” she commented, and observed how stiffly he held his left arm. “He must have been a terrible person, that big, burly burglar!”

The significance of her tone did not escape Tom. He grinned.

“You’re pretty smart, Sadie. Would you mind doing

something for me? Please telephone Miss Morland that I'm all right, but that I'll have to stick around the house for a day or two."

"I'll tell her you have a cold in your shoulder," she laughed, and in a few minutes returned from the drug store with the news that Miss Morland had departed, destination unknown, and left no word for anybody.

Tom's face clouded, and Sadie misconstrued the look. "He's awfully in love with her," she thought.



SADIE JOHNSON asked no questions. She dressed the bullet wound in Tom Wickham's shoulder and cheered him up with sprightly accounts of the day's happenings at the Alert Garage.

He spent the days in the easy chair by his window, thankful that the critical third day had passed without the development of fever.

Down at the great firm of Morland & Company, the office force received with varying comments the news that he was laid up.

The cynical attributed his "indisposition" to an attack of some particularly deadly "home brew," while the evil-minded thought he had gotten snarled up with a "vamp." One man, recalling Tom's long and embarrassing telephone conversation a few days before, shared the latter view, although he would have been shocked out of a year's growth had he known the identity of the lady. To

him the daughter of Henry Morland was one who lived on the unattainable heights of a different world.

During the time while Sadie was away at work Tom had many dragging hours in which to review the events leading up to the present.

He was angry at Lucille Morland's selfishness—running away without an apparent thought of what might have happened to him. She could not have failed to hear the shots. Under no circumstances could he imagine Emily Harbridge showing so little feeling, or Sadie Johnson, either.

He was angry at Henry Morland, too. He had not before realized the nature of Mr. Morland's business, or at least it had never before been presented to him in quite the same light.

The newspaper references to Morland's vast war profits in foodstuffs brought him into direct comparison with the difficult condition of Tom's own father, who raised the food.

There was something radically wrong, Tom decided, in the distribution of earned reward when the farmer who slaved long weeks and months, gambling with fickle weather while raising the grain, should receive so much less than the speculator who traded in it.

And yet the consuming public was paying in many

cases, far more than the goods were worth, even allowing a generous profit to both producer and middleman.

He was not certain he wanted to continue in the employ of Henry Morland. He remembered the excitement in the office when Mr. Morland, in a tremendous bear campaign, had hammered down the price of corn to the lowest price in three years. The farmers had suffered, the consumers had not benefited, but Mr. Morland had profited enormously.

In his mind's eye he saw his father working under great difficulties, with insufficient help, winter and summer, at the mercy of droughts and rains, producing by the sweat of his brow the necessities of life, and then he saw Mr. Morland garnering the fruits of those labors.

In these brooding hours Tom found a mournful pleasure in thinking of home and of what they were doing down there.

What a mess he had made of things in the city! And, beneath the tinsel of city gaiety, what disillusionments! Selfishness, greed, ostentation, duplicity, cutthroat business methods, crafty evasions of the law, crime flourishing in the face of official complacence or connivance!

In Tom's frame of mind, the farm, with all its hard work, seemed glorified in comparison and the farmer who creates useful wealth from the ground gained a new dig-

nity as the one upon whom the whole world depends for life and pleasure. Without him, the whole elaborate structure of society and commerce and law would crash down in a single year, humanity would strip off its veneer of civilization, and the world would revert to the chaos of barbarism.

And yet he had heard city people speak contemptuously of the "yaps" from the tall grass!

From his suit-case Tom took out a picture of Emily Harbridge and gazed long into the frank clear eyes. How different she was from Lucille Morland, and how infinitely finer!

He placed the picture on the dresser, where Sadie Johnson seeing it later, thought it was the picture of Lucille Morland, but oh, so very much nicer-looking than the frequent newspaper pictures had revealed her. It confirmed Sadie's conviction that Tom was deeply in love with Miss Morland.

Her mistake was destined to have unwelcome consequences.

As Tom looked at the picture he gave himself up to melancholy reflections.

"I wonder if Emily ever gives me a thought any more. Goodness knows I don't deserve it, for I've been a miser-

able correspondent." He smiled bitterly. "But then, I haven't had much that was cheerful to write about."

And then his mother's comments about Emily and Harry came back to him.

Harry *was* sticking it out down there longer than seemed humanly possible—for Harry. Several months of close association with him in France had shown the fundamental weakness of his character.

Tom would have wondered less could he have seen Harry at that moment, seated on the Harbridge veranda with Emily, whose grave eyes were turned away as Harry talked in a low voice at her side.



MATCHES are made in heaven or in haste.

The Fates, which, in their more or less infinite wisdom, decree who is to marry whom, were making a sad mess of it in the case of Tom Wickman and Emily Harbridge.

Circumstances were sweeping both of them closer and closer to people they did not love and had no desire to marry.

While Tom in the city was brooding over his affairs, Emily in the country was having her own difficult problems.

“Do you know,” Harry Ellgate was saying, “I’m afraid our friend Tom is finding the world very pleasant since he fell in with Lucille Morland. She’s——”

“Please, Harry, I don’t want to hear about her,” Emily interrupted, and then added hastily: “Goodness knows I’m sure I hope he is enjoying himself, wherever he is!”

"It would be a good match," calmly continued Harry, lighting a cigarette. "I can't say she appeals to me, but she is beautiful and has oodles of money."

Emily said nothing. A number of times of late Harry had referred to Tom and Miss Morland, and, against her will, she was beginning to bracket them in her thoughts.

She arose abruptly.

"It's time to go to the rehearsal," she said in a tired voice. "I wish the dreadful play was over and—in Halifax!"

The rehearsals were being held in the town hall, where the play was to be given a few days later. Harry had organized a dramatic club in Grangefield, and for some weeks the company had been working on a production of *She Stoops to Conquer*. During this time Harry and Emily had been thrown together a good deal, much to the gloomy resentment of Bud Andrews.

"I haven't the ghost of a show with her myself," thought Bud, "but I sure don't want to see her tied up to this bird from the city. I'd prefer to hand her over to Tom." His eyes hardened. "But he hasn't got her yet. There's a certain little test I'm framing up." And he smiled a canny smile.

Later that evening, looking out into the moonlight from her bedroom window, Emily railed at circumstance.

Harry Ellgate had proposed again this evening as he had done at every suitable opportunity for the past two weeks.

She liked him, but she didn't love him. No one could ever take the place Tom had held in her heart since childhood.

But Tom—? He had never proposed. And even though it had been tacitly understood that some day they would be married, he had gone away almost without a word and had written only a few vague, friendly letters since.

Harry's constant insinuations about Lucille Morland were shaking a faith which she had believed unshakable. It was quite possible that Tom's new-found interests might have forced her into the background.

On the other hand, he might be waiting, ashamed to confess that, so far at least, he had not made a success of things.

She was in the position of many girls who approach that difficult ordeal when they must decide whether to marry the man who is on the ground and eager, or wait for a dream to come true. It would be tragic should the dream, delayed by good and sufficient reasons, come true too late.

And yet she realized that every girl who is happily married may not have got the one her heart was originally

set upon. The plodding suitor may make a priceless husband, and the fascinator may be a woeful failure in the every-day confines of matrimony.

Harry Ellgate was agreeable, amusing, and considerate. Always a gentleman, he had lived down the handicap of his city elegance and had made even the doubting ones his friends. And yet Emily had an intuitive feeling that he lacked a certain dependability. There was a fixed conviction that he would fail under a crucial test.

If the test never came, her life might move along evenly enough, without any very high or very low spots; and if there were children, she would probably be contented and happy.

And the town considered him distinctly eligible—with money, education, breeding. His work as a farm hand was commonly accepted as a whim, and his propinquity to Emily the only bond that held him to it. There was much speculation about Tom, but not as much as in Emily's own heart.

If she could only see him again! She knew her instinct could tell her unerringly whether or not he had changed toward her. And the Fates, sitting away off some place minding everybody's business, must have read her thoughts.

Early next morning a frantic voice reached her on the

telephone. "Emily, you've *got* to go up to town to see about Tillie Randall's costume. She can't leave her mother, and the costume is impossible. Built for an elephant! You're the only one who can help."

Emily consented with a joyous eagerness in her heart that spoke volumes to her head.

It gave her the excuse to go without the sacrifice of pride.



THE morning mail brought Tom Wickham a letter from his father:

MY DEAR SON, I feel it is unfair to conceal from you any longer the way things are running here on the farm. I don't want to worry you with a hard luck story, but the facts are serious.

Either you've got to come home and help handle the place or else I've got to sell out. There's a Polack family that wants to buy, but they want easy terms and considerable time to pay. They're willing to work hard, the whole family, children and all, while the boys of the old American families get filled up with education and fancy ideas and want to go to the cities. Not that education isn't a fine thing—and I must say I hate to see small children slaving—but the millennium hasn't arrived and some of us can't have everything.

One by one the old families around here are selling out to the Polacks and are now living off their incomes in the towns. Of course that's some people's idea of Heaven, but I've always been accustomed to lots of space around me. We're getting too far along, your mother

and me, to take readjustment very easily, and I must say I don't like to see the old place go into other hands if it can be helped. You can't live on sentiment, but some of it's good to have around.

This last summer and fall have been mighty discouraging. Corn has dropped nearly seventy per cent., while the things we have to buy have come down only twenty-five to thirty per cent. A few months ago thirty-three bushels of corn would buy a suit valued at sixty-five dollars. To-day, if clothing had dropped as much as corn, we could buy that same suit for twenty dollars and fifty cents. That illustrates what has happened to us.

What help I can get still wants high wages, and I tell you it's hard for a man who hasn't a big family to help him to compete with these frugal and industrious Polacks, who all have any number of children to help do the work.

And another thing that I don't like. You are working for Henry Morland. I've been waiting for you to find out for yourself the connection between his business and mine. Do you know that he has been one of the biggest bears in grain speculation and has hammered down the price of corn until the farmers are ready to mob him? And as far as I can make out, nobody but himself benefits. That is, the food that comes from the grain is still unreasonably high.

Of course he's not wholly to blame for the big drop. The big crop helped bring down prices, and I reckon we'd have been better off financially if we'd raised only half a crop. But then where would the city poor be!

Now there's how matters stand, Tom. I hope you will see your way clear to coming back and running the place. It'll be yours one of these days, and I don't mind saying

I'm just about ready to quit. Your mother has been ailing. She misses you terribly, but she hardly ever says anything. We both send love.

Tom read the letter over again, and then, for the first since his accident, left the house for the offices of Henry Morland.

Mr. Morland's secretary informed him it would be impossible to see him. However, he would take any message—?

“I'm employed here,” said Tom, “perhaps if Austin Newell said a word—?”

“Oh, you know Mr. Newell?”

“Yes, we were together in France.”

“Just a moment, please. I think Mr. Morland will see you.”

After a short pause, Tom was shown into the paneled office of the great financier.

“Well, young man, what can I do for you?” Mr. Morland was in good humor. He had hammered down the price of corn another ten cents during the morning session.

“I came to thank you for giving me a chance here, and secondly to resign.”

“Resign! Why, what's the matter? Have you found something better than this? Or don't you like the work?”

“The work is all right, but I don’t like the business.”

Morland sat up, his face lost its jocular look and his eyes hardened. They reminded Tom of Lucille Morland’s eyes when he had first met her. He reached for the push button, but Tom’s next words arrested his action.

“I think you’re in a rotten business, Mr. Morland. My father’s a farmer and your gambling operations are driving him to the wall. I don’t want to work for you any more.” Tom rose. “That’s all, Mr. Morland. Good morning.”

Mr. Morland stared after him in amazement. He rubbed his hand back over his head and for some inexplicable reason he felt very uncomfortable.

“Deluded fool!” he muttered and rang for his secretary.

“Strike young Wickham’s name off the pay-roll!” he ordered.

In the meantime, young Wickham, torn by conflicting emotions, had started for a long walk in the park, ignorant that an unopened telegram from Emily Harbridge was awaiting him at his boarding-house.



BEFORE leaving Grangefield for the city Emily Harbridge telegraphed Tom Wickham: "Arriving on noon train for afternoon only. Hope you can meet me. Emily."

It was this despatch which was delivered after Tom had left his boarding-house to interview Henry Morland, the result of which had been his resignation from the employ of that gentleman. Consequently Emily was not met.

During the whole trip she had pictured her arrival and wondered whether his greeting would confirm her fears or dispel them. She was certain her instinct would tell her whether time and absence had weakened the old bond between them. She felt that the whole future hung upon the impression formed during the first few minutes of their reunion. And he did not meet her!

As the platform cleared this fact was borne in upon her consciousness, and she grew heartsick with disappointment. What did it mean? Did he care so little?

As her thoughts flashed back in review of the years of their friendship she could not conceive of his failing her in common courtesy, even though his deeper feeling might have undergone a change. Her telegram must have failed to reach him. There was but one course to follow. Even at the risk of wounded pride she must give him the benefit of the doubt and endeavor to get in touch with him.

Telephoning Morland & Company, she was curtly informed that Mr. Wickham was no longer in their employ.

"Do you know where I can get him?" she asked.

"No. He left us to-day."

Somewhat surprised by this news, Emily hunted in the telephone directory for Mrs. Johnson's number, but no number was listed. She could not telephone.

In deep perplexity she sat down in the waiting-room to think things over calmly and clearly. Either she must go to his house and inquire or else go back home without having settled, once for all, to what extent in future she should allow herself to think of Tom Wickham. She decided to see him, if possible.

A taxi took her to Mrs. Johnson's house, and Sadie, opening the door, gazed at her with an interest unsuspected by Emily.

"He is not here, now, Miss Morland," she said, and before the startled Emily could interpose a correction Sadie went on to speak of a wound.

"To-day is the first day he has been out since he was hurt."

"Hurt!" exclaimed Emily. "I hadn't heard——"

"No; the first thing he asked was that I let you know, but when I called up you had gone. He wanted me to assure you he was not badly hurt."

Emily's thoughts were racing in bewildered confusion, but out of the maze arose one depressing fact. When Tom was in distress his first thought had been of Lucille Morland, not for her. What else mattered? She was angry and hurt and jealous, and without stopping to correct Sadie's mistake of her identity she invented a hasty excuse and fled down the steps.

When Tom returned, about five o'clock, he found the telegram. His first thrill of happiness was swiftly followed by a sinking of the heart. While he had been out walking off his anger Emily had come and gone. Even now, he knew, the evening train was probably pulling out. There was simply nothing to be done. He threw himself

helplessly into a chair, and there Sadie found him when she came in shortly after.

She greeted him cheerfully.

“Your friend, Miss Morland, was here to-day.”

Tom started up.

“Impossible!”

But Sadie’s report of the visit convinced him.

After supper, in his room, Tom read and re-read Emily’s telegram. This lost opportunity of seeing her brought it home to him how intensely he really did want to see her. It seemed as though he had never wanted anything so much in his life. And here it had been Lucille Morland, instead of Emily, who had come to his house. He became filled with a sudden, unreasoning resentment against Lucille. Why in the world should she be pursuing him again? Hadn’t she caused him enough trouble already? Nearly all his recent difficulties could be traced directly back to some impulsive whim of this spoiled, selfish girl—and Tom determined to end things definitely and finally.

In this mood he wrote a brief note to Lucille Morland, addressing it to her home.

MY DEAR FRIEND: For the good of both of us I am sure you will agree with me that we should not see each other again. Our friendship—you may think that a

mild word for it—has had its delightful phases, for which I am grateful. But you must surely realize that it can never be dignified by a stronger term. For that reason why should we not face a fact which we both know to exist? Please agree with me, and know that this good-by also carries my sincerest good wishes for a happy life, untroubled by further association with me.

“There!” he muttered. “That ought to finish her!”

He then wrote to Emily, addressing the note to Grangefield. His heart sang as he wrote the few words. Reserve was broken down in this first real love-letter to her.

DEAREST: I am broken-hearted at having missed you to-day, and I'm coming to you as fast as I can. Expect me surely to-morrow night. TOM.

That night he slept the sleep of happiness, blissfully ignorant that he had placed the letters in the wrong envelopes.



EMILY HARBRIDGE arrived home on the evening train. She had stared unseeing out of the window during the four-hour trip while an emotional conflict raged within her.

She was resentful, bitter, and heartbroken.

She was angry at having exposed herself to the intense hurt her pride had sustained, and she was embittered by the thought that Tom Wickham, who had been enshrined in her heart since they were children together, was apparently in love with another.

She knew she could never feel toward any one else as she had always felt toward him, and gloomily she felt that nothing could ever deaden the pain in her heart.

Harry Ellgate met her at the station.

"You're very quiet," he said as he drove her home.

"I'm tired," she answered; and as Harry refrained

from asking questions she was conscious of feeling grateful to him for his consideration. Harry had a genius for knowing when to talk and when not to.

“You must get a good rest to-night,” he said, with tender solicitude in his voice, “and to-morrow night you’ll make a tremendous hit in your part.”

The following evening was to see the production of *She Stoops to Conquer*, with Emily playing the part of Kate Hardcastle. For weeks the rehearsals had been going on. The play was to be the big social event of the season, and Grangefield was agog with anticipation.

Emily passed an unhappy night. Not even the imminence of the play could still the ache inflicted by what she considered Tom’s inconstancy.

In the morning her mother asked if she had seen Tom in the city. Later in the day others asked the same question. To all she simply said she had not seen him, checking further inquiry by abruptly changing the subject.

In the afternoon there were final rehearsals of certain difficult parts, and when at last she went home to snatch an hour or two of rest before the ordeal of the evening her mind had been diverted from her distress.

It was then that she found on her bedroom table an envelope addressed in Tom’s familiar handwriting. With quickened pulse and a sudden foreboding she opened it.

"My dear friend: For the good of both of us I am sure you will agree with me that we should not see one another again," and so on. What a cruel letter! How devoid of every instinct of kindness! Oh, how could Tom have written her in this heartless style!

Poor Emily! Could she only have known that this was not the letter that had been meant for that envelope. But she didn't know, and she withered under this death-blow to her hopes, and, more than that, to almost all the tenderness she had felt toward Tom Wickham.

How he must have changed! The Tom she had known would never have inflicted such unnecessary pain on one who had been such a dear friend, to say the least, for so many years. The city must have wrecked the sweetness in his nature. Her old Tom was gone.

She felt that she never wished to see him again, and in the first blaze of resentment she tore his picture into tiny bits and then flung herself weeping on her pillow.

She arose a new and reckless Emily. It didn't matter what happened. If Harry still wanted her, she would say yes. It might as well be Harry as any one else.

In this mood, with reckless gaiety shining in her eyes, she prepared for the play.

Far away in the city a different little drama was being unfolded.

Lucille Morland, back from her country home, was reading over and over a very surprising note:

DEAREST: I am broken-hearted to have missed you to-day, and I'm coming to you as fast as I can. Expect me surely to-morrow night. TOM.

It was not entirely clear to her how and where he had missed her. He must have called at her house during the previous day. That would be explained. Meanwhile here was the note, postmarked the day before, so he must be coming to-night, and that was the only thing that mattered. She made no attempt to disguise the eagerness she felt.

With shameless directness she proceeded to set the stage for the rare combination, that most alluring of all triangles—the time, the place, and the girl. Then, garbed in her most beguiling gown, and with flaming cheeks and tingling nerves, she awaited his arrival.



LUCILLE MORLAND, eagerly awaiting the arrival of Tom Wickham, became impatient and nervous as nine o'clock approached.

"What in the world is keeping him?" For an hour she had been posed effectively, in her most alluring gown, on the big davenport before a crackling fire. She made a pretty picture, and she knew it. He could not fail to be impressed.

And he had already kept her waiting for an hour! Her impatience was turning to irritation. She resolved to teach him the importance of promptness.

The door-bell rang.

"Bring him in here," she instructed Herman on his way to the door, and then rearranged herself on the davenport.

Her heart was beating madly, and she knew her cheeks were flaming with excitement. Her smile was of the friendliest as she turned her eyes to the doorway.

It was Mr. Morland who entered. How perfectly maddening!

“Father!” she exclaimed. “Why, I thought you had gone!”

“Didn’t have to. Got a telegram at the last minute. I dined at the club. Must have left my keys at the office.”

He sat down in a big easy chair, and as he lighted a cigar in preparation for a comfortable evening his daughter’s thoughts were whirling in a panic of emotion. What an awkward situation! Any moment might bring Tom, and there would have to be explanations—a beastly mess of things! And, besides, the effect to her reception would be lost. She was intensely agitated, so much so that her father finally sensed it.

“Were you expecting some one? Shall I go?”

“I rather expected Mr. Wickham. You know, you thought it would be nice to ask him here some time.”

Mr. Morland’s eyes lighted up with a sharp glint, which gradually changed to one of humorous enjoyment.

“I shall enjoy meeting the young man—again.” His daughter caught the half veiled significance of his tone.

“What do you mean, father?”

"He called on me only yesterday to tell me what he thought of me and my business, and then resigned his job." Mr. Morland smiled amiably. "As nearly as I could gather, I'm not a fit person for him to work for. He's a very particular young man."

"It's incredible!" exclaimed Lucille. "Was he—was he under the influence—?"

"Nope. Perfectly sober, but fired by noble ideals. He's got a notion that I helped force down the price of corn. And his father's a farmer, you know."

Then Mr. Morland's voice hardened.

"Poor fool! There are a lot of other people out in the country who think the same way. As if I, or anybody else, could have any influence on the value of grain. It's a matter of supply and demand. There's been a big crop, hence the fall. But you can't convince the farmer. He thinks prices ought to stay up to the war level."

"But you *have* been bearing the market, father."

"Sure. I knew the prices would fall." He stared reflectively into the fire and then added: "Besides, even if I did anything to lower the price of corn, think how many people were benefited by it. Think of the lower prices of food for the millions in the cities. If they're cursing me in the country, they ought to be putting up monuments to me in the cities."

There was a long silence. Lucille glanced up at the clock, and she knew that Tom Wickham was not coming. Her preparations had been in vain. The evening, which had promised so much, had flattened out, and she kissed her father on his bald spot and went to her room.

“Well, I suppose it’s over,” she thought. “Another horrid trick of Fate. I get everything in the world except the one thing I want most of all.”

She was painfully conscious of her depression and disappointment. In vain she tried to reason them away. Over and over she repeated: “I don’t love him. I don’t love him. Why should I allow myself to feel miserable? There has never been a moment when I couldn’t have tossed him over without a pang. I could never marry him, never—never!” But all these arguments, directed by her reason, failed to lessen the deep hurt that rested so heavily upon her heart.

“I didn’t want *him* to end it. I wanted to end it myself, when I got ready.” There was the real wound. And it rankled and pained her worse than any she had ever before suffered.

“I’ll not give him another thought!” she cried, but she had never learned that real heartache is beyond the cure of will and reason and logic.

She slowly removed her clothes, the attractive gauzy

things she had chosen so carefully for the occasion, and, drawing about her a soft dressing gown, sat for a time thoughtfully staring at nothing. The flush had left her cheeks, her eyes were saddened, and her face looked tired.

That night her pillow was drenched with the first real tears she had shed for a long, long time.



IT WAS the night of the play in Grangefield. There was great excitement in the town, a sort of grown-up excitement of the same kind that children feel on Christmas Eve.

Long before eight o'clock streams of people were converging toward the opera-house and the country roads were alive with incoming cars.

"Some crowd, I'll say," remarked Bud Andrews, his eye glued to the peephole in the curtain. "Looks like a bird's-eye view of a caviar sandwich. If they expect to crowd any more in here they'll have to let out a tuck in the opera-house."

Behind the scenes there was the customary hectic flurry incident to the first production of an amateur play. Every player was keyed to the highest tension. Out in the body of the house a rising hum of voices registered the eagerness and the size of the audience and the open-

ing strains of the orchestra announced that the great hour was near at hand.

Emily Harbridge had arrived a few minutes before with Harry Ellgate. To Bud Andrews she never had looked more lovely. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes dancing with a nervous exhilaration, and Bud observed that her attitude toward Ellgate had suddenly become markedly friendly.

"I wonder if she's decided to take that bird," he thought uneasily. At the first opportunity he spoke to her.

"I may have some interesting news for you before long, Bud," she said, laughing. There was a suggestion of recklessness in her manner that was new to her.

"Wedding bells?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, I'm not saying." Then she ran to her dressing-room with a backward glance at the puzzled face of Bud Andrews.

"Well, be gosh; be gosh!" he muttered. "She's made up her mind. I'm in the discard, and Tom's on the skids, and 'Handsome Harry' wins out."

Through his mind shot a quick succession of thoughts. He remembered Ellgate when he first arrived in Grangefield, the marks of dissipation in his face. He remembered the shaking hands as they lighted cigarette after

cigarette and to his practised eye these symptoms were eloquent of a lurid past.

Ellgate had been "hitting it up," and had come to the country to sober down, if for nothing more serious. Who knew? For weeks he had not touched a drop. His nerves were normal, his hands steady, and his eyes clear, yet Bud could not help but feel that his regeneration was a matter open to grave doubts.

"If he marries Emily, he's got to show me that he won't flop back. He's got to submit to the acid test, and it's got to be applied P. D. Q."

With these reflections, and convinced that he was acting for the good of a dear friend, Bud made hasty preparations. He was sorry to ruin Harry, provided Harry fell, but it was the only way he could think of to save Emily. If Ellgate came through all right, so much the better. If he didn't, Emily would have time to renig before it was too late.

The audience was becoming impatient. A few desultory handclaps, like the first scattered shots of a battle, grew in volume until the house was in a clamorous uproar. The boys in the gallery were whistling and stamping, and the orchestra was drowned in the din.

Harry Ellgate, in his make-up, was rushing back and forth behind the curtain like a captain marshaling his

forces for the zero hour. Excited performers, each wholly concerned with himself, were clutching him from right and left. "Is my make-up all right?" "Where's my props?" "How do I look?" "What did you say I was to do in that third scene?"

Harry was half frantic.

Bud laid a hand on his arm and whispered.

"How about a small drink?"

For the fraction of a second Harry hesitated.

Perhaps he knew the consequences of the first drink—how the taste would arouse the dormant craving and destroy all restraint. Perhaps experience had taught him the danger of stirring that slumbering appetite, that sleeping madness in his blood, which, once aroused, was instantly beyond control.

Bud drew a flask from his pocket and Harry looked at the ruby clearness of the liquid with a sort of fearful fascination in his eyes.

"I'm all shot to pieces, Bud. This play has gotten on my nerves something frightful. Perhaps one small one will pull me together."

With nervous eagerness he took a swallow, then a longer one, and with the bottle in his hand he looked at Bud as though reluctant to yield it. There was a pathetic appeal in his eyes.

"A life saver," he murmured. "I may want another little drink before the show's over."

"That's all right. Keep it till after it's over," said Bud, and as Harry turned to his dressing-room Bud gazed after him with his face shadowed by a touch of sadness.

"It's a rotten trick, a dirty, low down trick, but if he's weak, now is the time to know it."

A moment later the bell sounded, announcing the rising of the curtain. The noise from the audience suddenly stilled and the house sat in expectant silence as the curtain creaked slowly upward.



WITH the rising of the curtain for the first act of *She Stoops to Conquer* there began an experience which Grangefield will never forget. Expecting an old English comedy, the audience witnessed a painful, pathetic drama not contemplated by the author of the play.

The house was packed and the audience was in its most generous mood. Bursts of enthusiasm greeted the appearance of each performer. Emily Harbridge, as Kate Hardcastle, was hailed by an explosion of applause that rocked the house. Harry Ellgate, appearing later in the first act as young Marlow, received a welcome the warmth of which testified to the popular place he had won for himself in the community.

His first spoken lines revealed a distinction and ability unusual in an amateur. To a striking degree he possessed that strange quality called "personality,"

which captures the instant and watchful interest of an audience.

The curtain went down amid a storm of applause in which shouts of approval mingled. Time after time the players responded to curtain calls, and when an imposing basket of American Beauty roses was handed over the footlights to Emily a buzz of excited whispering swept through the audience.

Emily had made a big hit, but the honors of the act easily fell to Harry Ellgate, whose acting had really been remarkable. The favor of the audience was manifested when he again came on the stage in the second act.

He threw himself into his part with a spirit which called forth frequent interruptions of applause. He acted as one inspired, and the animated whispering in the audience reflected the belief that he was inspired by Emily Harbridge.

He declined to take a curtain call alone in spite of the evident wish of the house to force this honor upon him.

The big scene between Kate Hardcastle and young Marlow in the third act was the one upon which the greatest expectations were centered. Their first appearance came late in the act, and, as the passage approached, the other performers crowded into the wings to enjoy the high spot in the play.

As before, Harry was hailed by wild applause—yet he had not spoken two lines before a questioning wave swept through the house.

The audience became painfully uncomfortable. Every eye was gazing, fascinated, as the realization grew that all was not well.

Something was wrong with Ellgate. In the tense hush people glanced at one another! What in the world had happened to Harry Ellgate?

His enunciation, previously so distinct, had become thick and faltering. Twice he repeated his words. His movements were uncertain and so unsteady that once he barely escaped falling by seizing a chair. The audience knew his actions were not part of the play.

And the audience, every sense alert, did not miss the quick, significant glances that Emily Harbridge shot at Harry, the sudden look of awakening alarm in her eyes as he said: "I vow, Emily, you are vastly handsome."

The line in the play read: "I vow, child, you are vastly handsome."

And a moment later, from the way he said the lines, "Suppose I should call for a taste, just by way of trial, of the nectar of your lips," there was not a person in the crowded house but knew that he was drunk.

Emily's distress was evident, and from the strained

silence of the house now arose an undertone of comment which grew to an excited murmur.

When Harry Ellgate seized the struggling Emily and cried out thickly: "And why not now, my angel? Such beauty fires beyond the power of resistance!" the audience saw her throw a wild, appealing glance out across the footlights, where it rested for one startled instant upon an unexpected face in the crowd.

This speech was Harry's exit cue, but he simply clung to the struggling girl in his arms.

Some one shouted: "Pull down the curtain!" and after a distressing pause the curtain hastily descended upon a stage filled with hurrying figures hustling Harry Ellgate from view.

Then the storm broke. Relieved from nervous tension, the confusion in the house rose to an angry uproar. The orchestra, slowly awakening to the need of the situation, started up a lively tune, which was as suddenly stilled by Bud Andrews' appearance before the curtain.

He raised a hand and there was instant silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen, owing to the unfortunate indisposition of one of the company, the performance can not continue. We desire to thank you for your attendance and express a deep regret that the play can not be concluded."

And this was Tom Wickham's homecoming! Arriving on the evening train, he had gone direct to the opera-house to seek Emily Harbridge. He was an amazed witness of Harry Ellgate's disgrace and Emily's humiliation.

Pressing against the current in the crowded aisles, he made his way behind the scenes. He caught a fleeting glimpse of Emily, but she hurried out without speaking to him. He had a feeling she had purposely cut him.

Harry sat slumped in a chair, his head buried in his hands, his shoulders shaking with sobs.

"I'm no good, I'm no good," he kept repeating as the consequences of his misstep penetrated into his consciousness.

It was Tom who got him safely home and to bed at the Wickham farm-house.



THE morning after the painful collapse of the amateur play Tom Wickham drove over to the Harbridge farm and was told that Emily was not in.

Twice again that day he had the same experience. To his telephone calls he received the same response, and he knew then that she was purposely avoiding him.

Was she in love with Harry Ellgate? And had the humiliating experience with Ellgate made her determined to isolate herself from her friends?

Many people begin to appreciate things only when they are threatened with the loss of them. The thought that Emily Harbridge might be passing out of his life brought home to him the realization of how very much she meant to him.

All the happy anticipations of his homecoming were shattered by Emily's course in avoiding him.

Harry Ellgate was still at the Wickham farm fighting

off a threatened fever. He was intensely depressed. He felt that he had, in one weak hour, forfeited all the esteem which he had won by months of clean living in the country.

He reflected bitterly upon the pitiless judgments of the small community.

“How fickle is public favor! With you when you’re on the crest, against you when you’re in the trough.”

Two mornings later Tom and Harry were talking. Tom had just returned from Grangefield, where the big topic of conversation was Harry’s spectacular fall from grace.

“Everybody’s wondering where you got the stuff, Harry. They say they never heard of you drinking anything before down here.”

“I haven’t touched a drop for months—until the other night. That’s the tragedy of it.”

“But where did you get it?”

“Andrews gave it to me just before the play.”

“Did he give it to you or did you ask him for it?”

Harry paused and Tom quickly added:

“He offered it to you, didn’t he? Isn’t that so? He offered it to you just before you went on, didn’t he?”

Harry did not answer. When he spoke it was with no feeling.

"It's all my own fault. I ought to know enough by this time not to trifle with it. Some people can drink moderately. I can't. When I start it's all off."

"I'll bet Andrews knew that!" exclaimed Tom indignantly. "But why should he want to get you in bad?"

Harry smiled ruefully.

"I guess he must have considered me a rival."

It was Tom's turn to be silent.

"Tom, I suppose you know what a fine girl Emily is. It may interest you to know that I've been trying for some time to induce her to marry me. The evening before the play I began to think I had a chance. She suddenly changed in her attitude and I could have sworn she had decided to take a chance with me."

Tom's face was very grave.

"I always knew she was in love with you, Tom. But you stayed away and didn't seem to care. A girl that's worth having is worth working hard to get, and you certainly were not doing that."

"I still think you're the only one she likes, Tom, and that something happened in the last few days that convinced her that you had thrown her over."

"I wrote her that I was coming down the night of the play," Tom exclaimed. "Did she mention that to you?"

"Not a word. She said she had not seen you in the

city, but that's all. She seemed anxious to avoid discussing you."

"I wonder if my letter reached her," said Tom. "If she knew I was coming down it seems natural she would have mentioned it to you, no matter how little interest she may have had in me. She knew we were old friends."

"Hasn't she seen you yet?"

"No; unless she saw me at the play."

"My advice, Tom, is to go over. Stay there till she does see you. I'm out of the running. Besides, if she had taken me I think it would have been from wounded pride, or on the rebound. I had no illusions about how I stood, but even at that I'd have taken a chance."

Tom's further course of action was influenced by a letter which came from Sadie Johnson.

Dear Tom: I made a fierce mistake. Do you remember I told you that Miss Morland called one day while you were out? Well, it wasn't Miss Morland at all, but some one else—the same girl whose picture you had on your bureau. I made the mistake of assuming that the picture was one of Miss Morland. To-day the real Miss Morland called. I recognized her by her voice, which I have often heard on the garage telephone. She called to ask if you were ill, for she expected you the evening before and you had not come. I told her you had gone home the day before, and she said there was surely some mistake, for you had written her that you were coming last night—

Through Tom's fevered imagination a thread of deductive reasoning took form. He must have got the letters switched in their envelopes! What a mess! He had written Emily that he was surely coming, and this letter must have reached Lucille!

Great Scott! Then Emily must have received the one meant for Lucille!

It explained everything. No wonder Emily avoided him. It explained her sudden change of attitude toward Harry Ellgate.

Tom leaped into his car and drove madly to the home of Emily Harbridge, who was coming in from the garage.

She saw him too late to escape, and he intercepted her at the door.



IN VAIN Emily Harbridge tried to conceal the agitation she felt. The look of indifference with which she sought to veil her emotions failed miserably of its purpose.

One glance into the intense face of Tom Wickham told her it was no time for polite dissembling. He was so terribly in earnest. Without warning, a crisis was at hand, and she looked helplessly about her.

“I want to talk with you, Emily,” were his first words. “That’s what I came down here for and I’m not going to leave this place till I do.”

The ice was broken, and with it she found herself regaining control of her emotions. She felt she could trust her voice to speak.

“Then by all means talk.”

He disregarded the implication of her remark. If she wanted to get rid of him, that could come later.

“Did you get a letter saying I was coming down?”

“No,” she answered, simply.

“Did you get another letter?”

She regarded him steadily for a moment.

“Yes—a very unkind one.”

She was amazed to see his face brighten up with a look of gratification.

“I knew it!” he exclaimed. “The two letters got switched in their envelopes.”

In spite of herself she revealed her deep interest.

“What do you mean, Tom? What letters?”

“The letter that you received was written to some one else, Emily.”

“Please explain,” she demanded, for want of something else to say, but within her she was conscious of a sudden surging elation.

“I wrote you, Emily, that I was coming to you the night of the play, and told you how heartbroken I was to have missed you when you were in the city.”

For the first time a faint smile softened the gravity of her face.

“The letter I received was nothing like that, Tom. It was a horrid letter.”

“Something about not seeing each other again?”

“Yes——” and she quickly added: “But for whom was that letter intended?”

In her mind leaped the thought of Lucille Morland, of whose association with Tom, Harry had so frequently referred.

"It was some one in the city—some one to whom I owe a great deal, for I learned through her how much I love you, Emily."

His face was white with earnestness as he looked into Emily's eyes. His voice was trembling with a depth of emotion she had never before heard, and her eyes wavered and fell.

"You don't know how much I've longed to be here with you, Emily. If I learned nothing else in my city experience, I learned that." He paused. "You do believe me, Emily, don't you?"

He took her hand, and he felt it tremble a little.

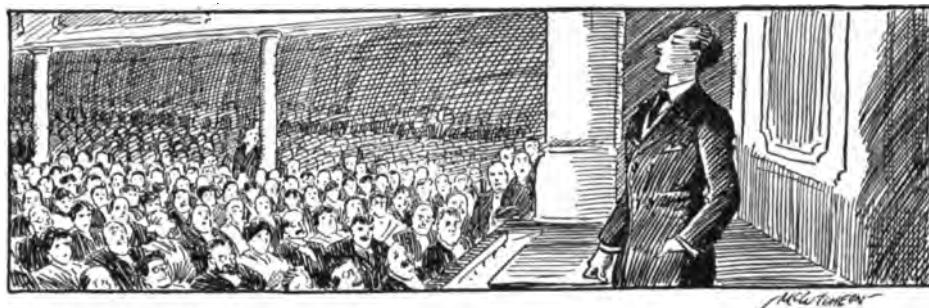
There was a suffocating silence that seemed to last an eternity, and then, suddenly, in his mind dawned the consciousness that she had not withdrawn her hand.

The next week's issue of the *Grangefield Gazette* chronicled two interesting bits of news. One was the announcement of the engagement of Thomas Wickham and Emily Harbridge, with the further information that the young couple would reside in the old homestead on the Wickham farm.

The other item was an announcement that "Mr. Harry Ellgate, who has been in our midst for some months, has engaged the opera-house for next Friday evening and will deliver an address the nature of which has not been disclosed. Admission will be free, and all who wish to attend are cordially invited to be present."

Of the two announcements, the latter, because so unusual and unexpected, aroused the deeper interest.

"What in the world does it mean? And what does he intend to talk about?" These questions arose in every mind. The interest in the forthcoming address grew and grew until, on the day of the speech, it became the supreme, dominating topic in every conversation.



IF THE Grangefield Opera-House was crowded the night of the amateur play, which was abruptly terminated by Harry Ellgate's spectacular lapse from grace, it was crammed to more than its capacity on the night of his speech. Curiosity and the lure of another possible sensation were too much even for those most noisily outraged by the first affair.

It was shortly after eight when he walked out on to the stage, and an expectant hush fell upon the house.

He spoke easily and with the utmost composure.

“Ladies and Gentlemen: I am leaving Grangefield to-morrow, and before I go there is something I want to say. I am not trying to sell you anything nor ask you for anything.

“If any one has come to-night expecting something sensational, he will be disappointed. In that respect I have already contributed more than my share. I refer,

of course, to the painful night of the play when I chose an especially inauspicious moment to get drunk. For that performance I have written apologies to each member of the Dramatic Club, expressing my profound regret and the hope that I have not entirely forfeited their good will.

“This is all I shall have to say regarding that incident.

“As most of you know, I came from a large city to work as a farm hand in this community. I am still a tenderfoot among you, but I *have* worked, and I’ve worked with my eyes open. I have lived both lives, which is my only excuse for hoping that what I say may merit your attention.

“I came at a time when many of your young men were flocking to the cities. Their desertion of the farms had become a grave problem, and the more enlightened men among you were giving the subject the serious thought it demanded. I say ‘enlightened’ because all of you are not enlightened.

“Many farm hands are young men. They were contented before the war because most of them knew little of the attractions of city life. Now that so many have traveled and broadened their horizons they are no longer ignorant of the poverty of diversion in the average farming community.

“If you are going to keep young men on the farms

you must give greater thought to wholesome amusement for them. The old style farmer will resist this, but the old style farmer is not going to survive. He is fighting a losing fight and his day is nearly over.

“Every farming community has its organizations for considering economic problems. You have your granges, your local boards of trade, and your exhibitions. But just as important is an organization in every community to consider and provide means for bettering the condition of the farm hand, give him wholesome diversions, and put a fair share of enjoyment into his life.

“Provide good music, clean dancing, competitive athletics, and good reading, not too high-brow—and, above all, see to it that your farm hand is not too dog tired to enjoy any or all of them frequently.

“Give the women variety. Take or send them away in the dull season. That will amply compensate for that other season, inseparable from farm life, when it is necessary to work double time.

“If a farmer and his family can look forward only to an eternal drab monotony of hard work, meager profits, and long hours, then why in the name of heaven *should* any one stay on the farm?

“If you say you can’t afford it, it is not true. You farmers are the backbone of the whole economic struc-

ture. The world could worry along without any other class, but it couldn't exist without the farmer.

"There is no reason why he should slave to produce that which middlemen get rich in handling. No profession is more ancient and honorable. It is a clean wholesome life of productivity, infinitely better for children, healthier for everybody, safer for the youth of both sexes. There is no reason why the inestimable advantages of country living should be at a discount.

"It is perhaps true there are greater opportunities in the city, opportunities for money making, but that is the fault of a system which should be changed. The farmer, as his is the most necessary and vital of all professions, should have a first lien on whatever prosperity a country is enjoying.

"Improved methods of marketing, closer organizations for the mutual welfare of farmers, more scientific methods of farming, more congenial working conditions —these will go far to equalize the financial rewards in which the city man now exacts the cream.

"I could say something about the sloppy habits of over-worked farm women, but I do not wish to be unnecessarily rude. Travel will teach the farm woman the value of being neat and attractive.

"No man who has tried both city and farm life will

give up his cut-and-dried city job, with leisure he can call his own, for an endless succession of chores which never seem to get done, an insufficiently heated or lighted room, meals of little variety served sloppily on a soiled table-cloth (remember, I am not accusing *everybody!*) and nothing to do with his time when he does get any.

“And no wonder the women don’t serve their meals in city style and dress with immaculate neatness. What woman would willingly exchange her compact, steam heated apartment, with a handy bakery around the corner, for the entire responsibility of an old-fashioned, inconvenient farm-house and a back-number farm, to be at the beck and call of everybody and to help with all their odd jobs, but with nobody to help her?

“One thing you will all have to help to change before the young men and women will come back to you, and that is the idea that life on the farm is a synonym for ‘monotonous drudgery,’ which unfortunately it now is in the minds of many.

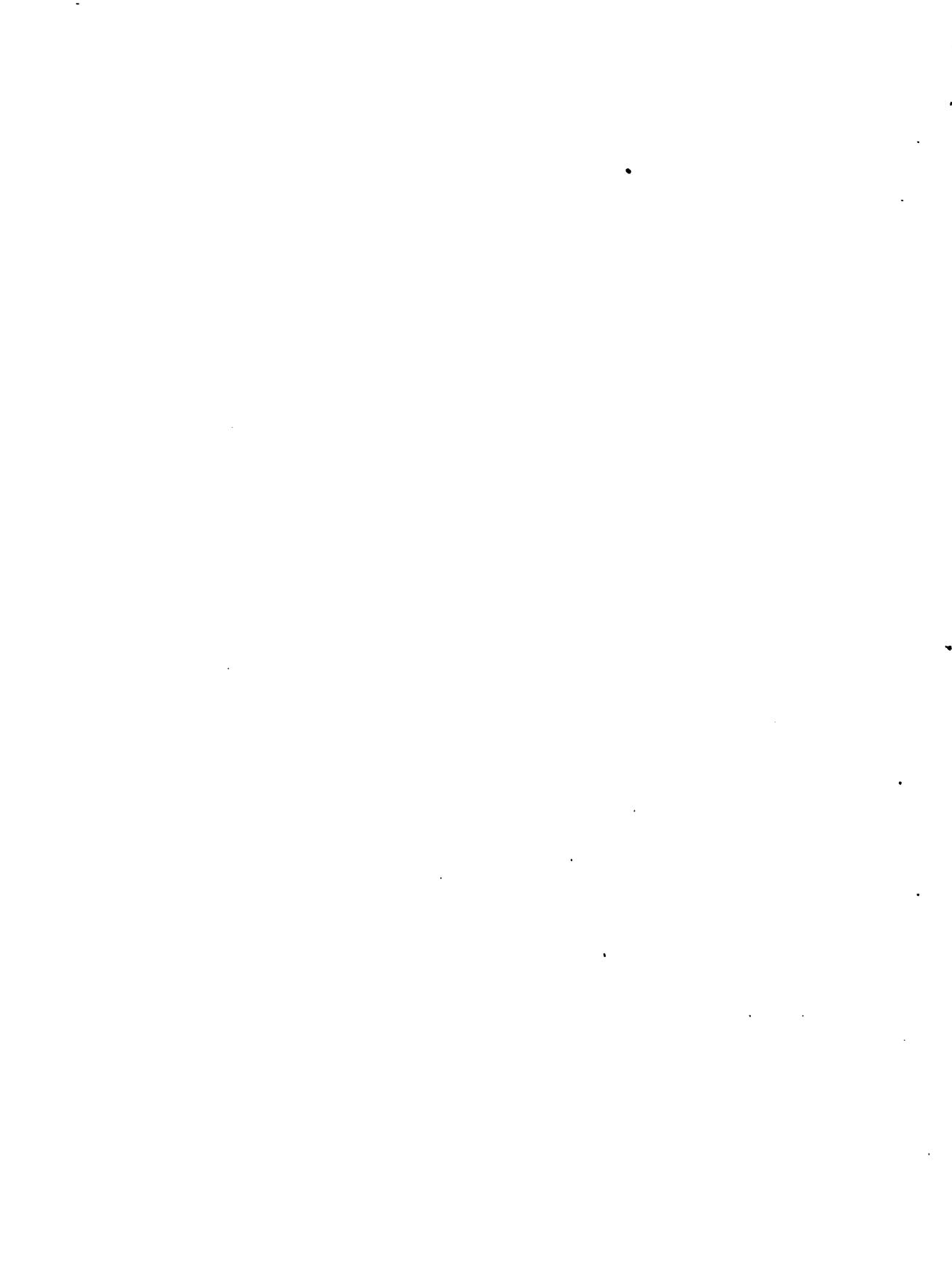
“Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to remind you of the many—in this community—very wonderful examples of enlightenment. Personally I shall leave the farm with regret. You have been kind to me. I wish I might take with me your good will, but if I have lost that it is my misfortune. I thank you for your attention.”

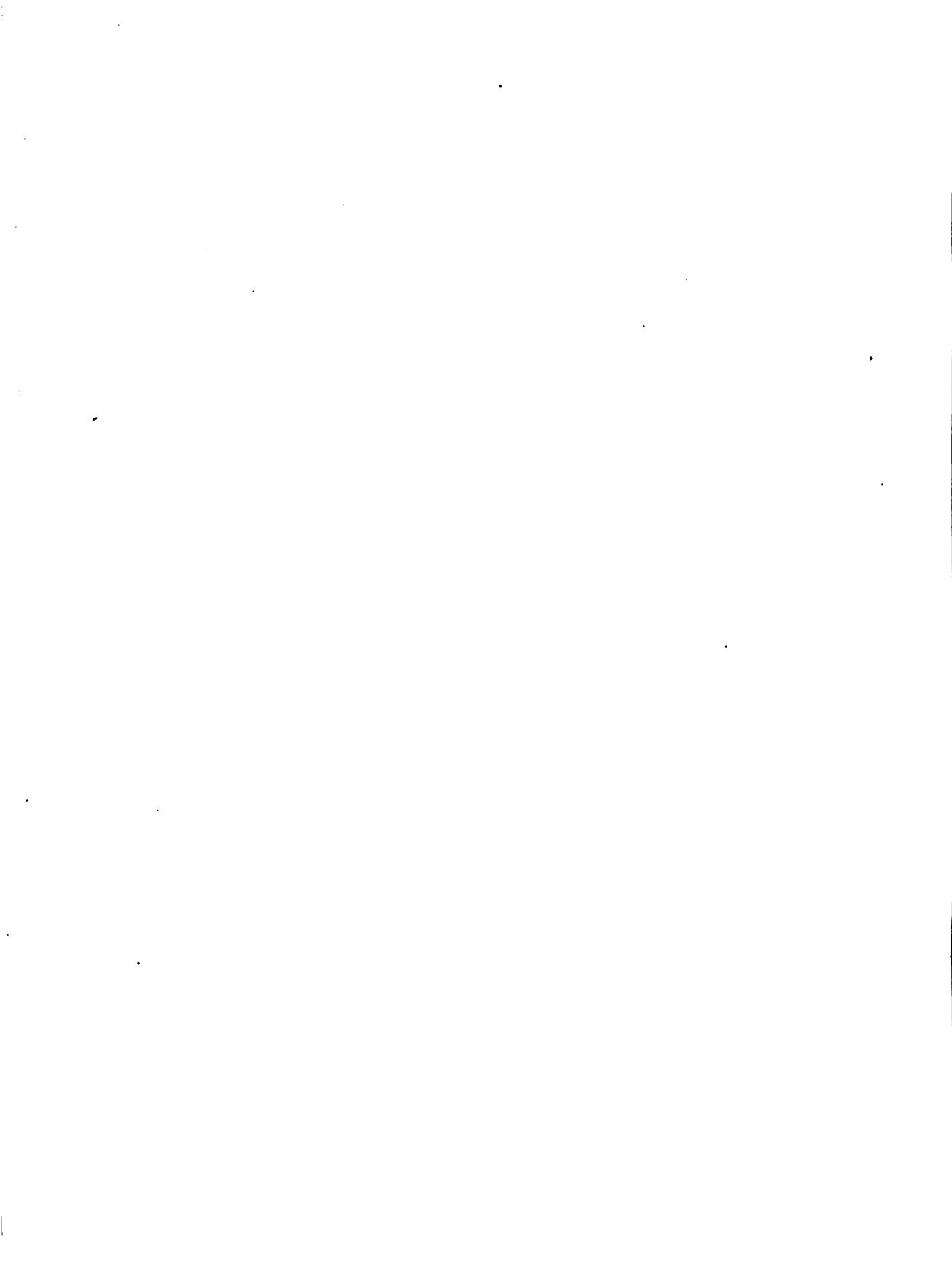
As Harry concluded the applause was desultory, but not unflattering. It was that of an audience preoccupied with new ideas. And the warmth of the hand grasps of those men and women who were in the habit of using their heads as well as their hands stayed long in the memory of the departing Harry.

Tom Wickham walked out into the moonlight, his head full of a Utopian vision of endless quiet, clean, prosperous farming communities where all the Sadie Johnsons of the world would be stronger and happier and all the Lucille Morlands softer and sweeter—and his heart very full of the one Emily Harbridge in the world, just as she was, working with him toward his ideal.

THE END







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